

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
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"EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR"

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Advent is God's Good News: EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR IS BORN ANEW!

People are talking and communicating with each other more today than at any other time in human history. Back in the day, if you wanted to talk to someone, you might pick up the telephone. REMEMBER? That black thing sitting on the table or hanging on the wall, with a round face and numbers! Or you might sit down and write a letter and then run it over to the mailbox. That blue box on almost every street corner in America! Or you might actually go visit someone and talk face-to-face. The living room in your house was invented just for that.

Today, not so much! Very few people use these options to make human connection anymore. Yes, we talk on the cell phone, but many would rather text. And yes, we'll visit in homes with friends, but drop-in visits are a thing of the past.

Most of this is not necessarily bad! Take a look at the people around us when we are out and about. Chances are at least 50 percent of those people have some kind of phone in their hands, and they are texting, showing someone photos, reading e-mail or listening to music. And the kids! They can carry on several conversations at the same time; multiple messages pop up, looking for instant responses and immediate attention. Replies are sent out in seconds. With texting, sending instant messages, and e-mailing, there are even more ways for us to communicate.

In fact sometimes it actually becomes difficult to unplug and disconnect from constant, ongoing communication. The concept of downtime is limited to when that electronic device is in need of re-charging. But even that does not necessarily stop the "talk."

In fact the whole idea of "FACE TIME" has taken on new meaning. With Skype and other computer-enabled visual technologies, "Face time" no longer means sitting down, face-to-face, looking into the eyes of another human being. Any interaction is considered face time. This may not be a bad thing either! When Pop-Pop gets to see the grandchildren on Skype it is a good thing! And none of it was possible just a generation ago.

Still, with all the possibilities, when was the last time we had a "heart-to-heart" talk where there was real give and take? Can you remember a real conversation?

We are so hard-wired to be in communication with one another. And yet there is nothing like being in the company of others. The irony of our modern world is that the smarter we get, the more "alone" we become. While we can "talk" to a thousand people, we can also isolate ourselves from everyone. Endless "conversations" can take place in the privacy of our home. In a society that has completely changed the meaning of the word "friend" too many people are feeling alone and isolated. It turns out that seeing words appear on a screen may not be as satisfying as seeing another person face-to-face.

Advent is about time spent with God!

If real "face time" with one another isn't happening, then our time spent one on one with God is on the endangered list. Advent invites us to change! Advent celebrates the INCARNATION, the Word Made Flesh! Advent announces that God was not willing to have a long distance relationship! Advent is all about God's desire to be with us! Advent is God in our face!

God begins the process with a message. It's not an email or text! It's a star in the sky, pointing the way. It's an angel with a message, that the impossible is now possible. It's some shepherds in a field, listening and learning. But even those messengers and those messages are not enough. God's desire is to deliver the Good News of HOPE in person. God has chosen to send His Son, to speak directly to the hearts and minds and lives of His Children.

The words of Psalm 80, which we spoke just moments ago, are the hope and the prayer of every child of God during Advent. 3 times we repeat this simple prayer: *"RESTORE US, O GOD, LET YOUR FACE SHINE ON US, THAT WE MAY BE SAVED."*

This is a cry for a relationship, for personal interaction, for "face time" with God. God's desire to be in our face is announced by a star in the sky, announced by angels singing God's glory, announced by heavenly messengers giving exact directions to simple shepherds.

And the prayer of Psalm 80 is the prayer of God's people today. *"LET YOUR FACE SHINE THAT WE MAY BE SAVED!"* That is the prayer of people surrounded by technology, and getting farther and farther apart from one another. It is the prayer of people who may receive hundreds of texts every day but who still feel unheard. It is the prayer of the human heart which does not want simply to be told OF love but needs to be touched BY love. It is the prayer of the hopeless, who still dream of being hope-filled.

The psalmist gives us the words of the prayer, and the season of Advent answers with HOPE! God's face shines not only in the baby Jesus but also in the joy of Mary, in the support of Joseph, in the surprise of the shepherds, and in the commitment of the Wise Men. Advent is our invitation to receive the gift of hope, the hope that is our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Everything we hope for is found in the face of God. *"LET YOUR FACE SHINE UPON US, O LORD!"* The answer to our prayer in Psalm 80 is a loud and clear YES!

GOD SAYS: Yes, I will hear your cry.

GOD SAYS: Yes, I will come and save you.

GOD SAYS: Yes, I will restore our relationship by forgiving and forgetting.

GOD SAYS: Yes, I will save you from those who think faith is foolish.

GOD SAYS: Yes, My hand will be upon you.

GOD SAYS: Yes, you will know the strength of your living God.

EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR! This is the promise of Advent! God's strength meets us in the moment of our weakness. There is no place too dark and no sin too great, to separate us from the light and the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The insistent message of Advent is: Do not settle for less than the full power of IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US! Do not allow Advent to be only about counting down the days.

ADVENT IS EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR! The HOPE that we are OK! The HOPE that there is a future! The HOPE that God is with us! Not a text! Not an email! Not even a star in the sky! God's own face, shining in our lives. EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR!

Hope has come; let the people rejoice! Lift up your voice to sing His praise! Hope has come; let the people rejoice! And let all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!