

The Four Noble Ideas of Advent by Dr. Dave Neale

Hope, peace, joy and love. These four noble ideas distill the significance of Advent. We have talked about each in turn, however briefly and inadequately of course. We say, as Christians, that the Advent Season is defined by these four noble ideas. Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Elevating these ideals to the centre of our view of life is immensely important to the meaning of life for us personally. To place these ideas at the centre of our view of the community of faith is also an aspiration of not only of also immense importance but audacity, even absurdity in way.

By saying that we hold these truths to be the basis of our conception of life, we elevate the possibilities of our lives. When we celebrate Hope, Peace, Joy and Love we create a structure, a framework for thinking about the project of life. Because by exalting these ideals to the highest importance, it focuses our activity on the highest virtues.

They come to define our aspirations. It points the way to the mountain top and their nobility gives us energy to climb.

Yes, Hope, Peace, Joy and Love are of immense importance to life..

We have two dangers when we talk about such ideas.

The greatest danger to us is that we fail, in all the hustle and bustle, to apprehend the nobility of the season; that we reduce them to slogans, to trivial expressions and, worst of all merely an excuse to consume.

The second danger is succumbing to cynicism about it all, with the result that all that we think and do rises no higher than that lowly viewpoint.

One of the things that a life in academics life bequeaths to you is the eternal presence of a hypothetical critic.

‘How can anyone living in a world like ours be so pollyannaish to ascribe to these ideals? Are you just naïve, just dreamers?

No... we aren’t just naïve; we aren’t just dreamers.

It isn’t just a matter of ***believing***, i.e. a matter of a moral or philosophical declaration. But for us these ideals are the essence of biblical history. It is what the biblical drama says to humanity.

This history of God’s people, a 3500 year conversation with humanity, is the story of hope, peace, joy and love played out on the very stage of human history.

That... is why we strive to saturate our actual living experience with these ideals. These noble ideas become ideals. How do these ideals become incarnate here?

- ***Hope***: Kids musical! The noble idea of hope found a wonderful expression in the faces of our youngsters singing and dancing their hearts out. If you need a dose of hope watch the service from Nov. 28.
- ***Road of Peace***: In our passage that week John the Baptist told us that Jesus would ***...guide our feet into the road of peace*** (v 79b). The Road of Peace is knowing that God is with us – ***And the peace of God, which surpasses even all knowing, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*** (Phil 4:7, my translation).
- ***Surprised by Joy***: That from the joys of human life; to that rarest of all human experiences, ineffable divine joy; to the discipline of expressing joy in the midst of affliction: that all things lead us to joy in life!
- ***The Fourth Noble Idea is Love***

There are two ways that the noble idea of love presents itself to us. The first is obviously, in that theological sense, this coming of the Christ child, the child of redemption, is the event *in history* where the love of God becomes incarnate. ***The***

Word became flesh and dwelt among us... We Christians believe that Jesus lived, and that his advent as the Christ is love in the most elemental human form – a living, breathing being in our midst. As Philipians says, ***though he was in the form of God...emptied himself...being born in human likeness... and so God exalted him...above every name...*** (Phil 2:5-9)

Suddenly, with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, love is no longer simply a noble aspiration, it is a human/divine reality. Such a powerful idea! An idea of immense importance and idealism. That is the theology of Advent. As always... we move from theology to praxis.

The second way love presents to us today is what I call the street level view of this sublime love. Remember that Sarah, the wife of Abraham was barren and advanced in years? She bore Isaac, the son of the promise that God would bless us all through Abraham. Hannah was barren but she bore Samuel who anointed David as King and of whom God said - ***I will establish the throne of your kingdom forever*** (2 Sam 7:13)

Elizabeth was barren but she bore John, the harbinger of the Messiah.

And Mary the most unlikely mother of them all. The Magnificat is nothing if not about this street level love of God. And none of it makes sense from a human point of view.

These barren women, it says in our reading today, are all a part of the ***...promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*** (Luke 1:55)

Why is it that the promise to Abraham of a people without number is fulfilled by the wombs of so many barren women? Why does God choose a maiden from a backwater village in Galilee, far from power and temple? These barren women, it says in our reading today, are all a part of the ***...promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*** (Luke 1:55)

Why is it that the promise to Abraham of a people without number is fulfilled by the wombs of so many barren women? Why does God choose a maiden from a backwater village in Galilee, far from power and temple? It is because God ushers in love through a complete redefinition of social and political realities, from the extreme margins of society; so a commoner not a queen will beget the new king.

It is a love that will exclude no one. It is madness. It is Hope!

Oh how we sorrow for those whose lives are bereft of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, these noble realities.

I read about a study in the NYT this week in which 1300 counsellors were asked what words characterized what they were hearing from clients in this weary path of covid, insurrection, fires and floods that we tread this past year:

Anxious... overwhelmed... burned out... stressed... depressed... lonely... isolated... stuck... empty... uncertain... done

We aren't saying the answer to all of this is easy. But we are saying that **this is the answer**:

It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of a God like this? (Romans 8:34).

Thanks be to God,

And now Elise, Jenna and Halina will lead us into a reflection of the beauty and power of this love through dance.

Amen

