

THE Promise OF Advent

The Promise of Advent: Preparing for a Season of Hope During Unparalleled Times

Episode 3 – Preaching in Grief: Bring Hope to this Year of Loss and Insecurity

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Host:

- Rev. Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor

The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas

Panelists:

- Rev. Magrey R. deVega, Senior Pastor, Hyde Park United Methodist Church

Tampa, Florida

- Dr. Elaine A. Heath, President, Neighborhood Seminary

Spring Forest, North Carolina

Episode Recap:

What does preaching in a season of Advent – a season of faith, hope, and peace – look like while we're also in a season of illness, economic loss, and other insecurities?

In this episode the panelists discussed that we are in an urgent moment that needs a “good word,” and pastors should speak into this moment to show light. They acknowledged that exhaustion has set in – we have been working months now in this uncertainty, and it's important for pastors to return to the basics of their faith and beliefs for spiritual strength.

When we are attentive, we find that most people are experiencing fear and grieving. How does your Sunday message address those concerns? We should exegete Scripture but also exegete the moment. Our Advent lessons are full of “do not fear,” so this is an ideal message for this year.

Self-care and becoming trauma-informed is extremely important during this time. Because we are living through a pandemic and cultural unrest, our collective trauma can trigger individual, unhealed wounds. Elaine recommended two books for this: *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* by Peter Levine and *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D. Both of these resources help with practices of self-compassion.

Continued on next page.

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Continued from previous page.

Our new normal will emerge in fits and starts, so strengthening our spiritual disciplines is essential. The panelists turn to these resources for spiritual nourishment:

- "Let Nothing Disturb You" by Teresa of Avila is a wonderful, daily meditation.
- Walter Brueggeman's *Spirituality of the Psalms* and his discussion of Orientation, Disorientation, and Reorientation informs this time in new ways.
- Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* helps us process that our view of what's important has been tossed up and the horizon has shifted. In this new normal, we can make more space for God.
- In the Bible, most stories are those of adversity, which can provide comfort and guidance today.

We are living through very divisive times, and Magrey encouraged pastors to attentiveness – keep your eyes open and see how God is working.

God's full revelation is in Christ, so Christ's actions – compassion and inclusiveness – are a calling for us today. Return to the Gospels to rediscover what kind of god God is.

Don't be afraid to preach prophetically. We are called to love one another, and preaching is an expression of this love. That doesn't mean it will be easy, but we are failing in our calling if we don't. Remember the prophetic texts of justice and equality – "the wolf will live with the lamb" – and keep reminding people to be empathetic. We're all children of God, and God's kingdom is one of peace and justice.

Connect with your fellow pastors even more during this time for strength and ideas. Our souls need light more than ever this year.

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