



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Good News for Advent  
November 27, 2016  
The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

Advent starts with ominous sounding readings about “the day” and the unexpected nature of it. We are to prepare and to live in state of preparedness, perpetual Boy Scouts. We certainly don’t want our houses broken into and robbed. Our Gospel makes the return of Jesus sound like something to be feared. Instead of a joyous reunion, we are to expect...what. That half of us will be gone and half will be left? I’m never really clear who is on the winning side in that scenario. Have the bad ones been sent somewhere or are the bad ones left to some Mad Max existence? Either way, I think we have some more hopeful images in Isaiah and Romans. Isaiah gives us the beautiful idea of a time beyond war and conflict – no more swords needed, let’s plant things. And Paul is at his most hopeful; let’s live honorably as if the day had already come. It’s time for us to awaken.

Last Sunday I shared a story from India called *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. Six blind men all touch an elephant and each one declares that it is like the part that they can feel, a tree, a spear, a rope, etc. They all apparently dismiss the experience of the others. Good story, timely message. How could they be so blind! Oh, perhaps because they were blind. Jesus’ first healing miracle was to cure blindness, to help people see what was in their midst, to help them see what was right in front of them, the whole elephant, heaven hiding in plain sight. To help us see. That is the Advent message of “wake up!” Open your eyes; look for other people’s experiences, see the world through new eyes. Hear a different way of telling a story that you already know.

My plan for Advent is to escape from the anxiety, fear, anger and defensiveness that make up too much of our emotional landscape right now. I plan to look for stories that show us heaven in our midst, the hidden truth and light and way that can happen at any time if only we will let it.

If you spend any time on Facebook, you may have heard this one already. Jamal Hinton is an African American high school senior in Phoenix, AZ. Early last week he received a text telling him what time Thanksgiving dinner was from his grandmother. He was suspicious because his grandmother had never learned how to use her phone. So he said, “send me a picture.” The selfie arrived of a white woman named Wanda Dench. Jamal sent back a picture of himself saying, “Um...you’re not my grandma, but can I still have a plate?” Wanda was quite embarrassed but recovered quickly, texting, “Of course you can, grandma’s feed everybody.”

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Jamal and Wanda became an internet sensation, somehow her phone number was included as people started forwarding and retweeting the story. She now has a new phone number and a lot of new admirers, and one new friend. The 17 year old came to Thanksgiving dinner and was seated in the midst of Wanda's big family. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world. And then he went and ate Thanksgiving dinner at his real grandma's house. Only a 17 year old could do that and live to tell about it! This unexpected ending to a wrong number exposed the kindness and joy and courage that lurk in our world, just waiting for us to see it. How many preconceived ideas were blown apart for the millions of people who saw this story? How easy it would have been for either of them to just write of an errant text and never give it a thought. It took wholeheartedness for them to do what they did. Maybe they realized that the world needed them to have Thanksgiving dinner together to help us wake up to goodness and joy.

Maybe the story of the people disappearing could be retold in such a way that they all got unexpected invitations to Thanksgiving dinner from someone who wasn't their grandma, but who said, of course you can come. There always room at the table. And those who were still at their desks and in the field, are the next ones who will get a wrong number and suddenly wake up to joy from an unexpected source.

Advent encourages us to think about the times we live in as the "not yet." We proclaim hope that things will someday be better, that poverty and war, and suspicion and hatred, will somehow melt away and be replaced by lions and lambs snoozing together and guns melted down to make sculpture. But even a quick glance will tell us that that hasn't actually happened yet, not yet. Well, we have a choice in the "not yet" time – we can be the obnoxious kids in the back seat whining "are we there yet?," or we can become cynical, or we can wake up to those moments of light around us and truly see the places in which heaven is most surely here. And then maybe we won't even wait for a wrong number to help us see things differently. And then maybe Jesus will come back not because we need to be saved from ourselves, but because he just wants to hang out in the heaven that we've already discovered right in our very midst.

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