

The good news of the Advent season is that God chose to become one of us. God sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, into our world, to live amongst us and experience our world first-hand. God is not a God Who is far away, Who refuses to stoop to our level, or Who doesn't want to "get His hands dirty". God doesn't know about our existence in the abstract, in a theoretical way, or only in concepts. God knows our lives and worlds and our communities experientially, because He came and lived among our concrete and practical every day lives. While our faith does have ideals and dreams embedded in it, they are always embedded in the ordinary lives of ordinary people, through whom God can do extraordinary things.

In John 1:14, John writes about the incarnation by saying, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (NRSV). The Message translation by Eugene Peterson puts it this way: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." When we talk about the importance of moving back into the neighborhood it is because this is following the example of Jesus. This is what Jesus did. Jesus moved into our neighborhood. That is the message of Advent. That is the good news we have to share.

Some people live in neighborhoods that are filled with crime and hopelessness. They are often scared to walk out into their own neighborhoods. What would it mean to them to have the Lord of the Universe move onto their street, value the people who live there, and say that God cares about this place? Some people live in wealthy, upscale neighborhoods, that others dream about moving into. But, sometimes they live isolated from their neighbors, not know anything about their lives, and living behind walls and gates and fences out of fear of what strangers might show up there. What would it mean to them to have the Lord of the Universe move onto their street, break down the barriers between people, and say that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18)?

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent, to continue Jesus' mission in the world to extend the kingdom of God on earth. Today, the Holy Spirit is continuing Jesus' Advent ministry of moving into the neighborhood. If God loves your neighborhood (and God does), and if the Holy Spirit is active in your neighborhood (and the Spirit is), what are they up to? What are they doing? And if we are Christians (which means "little Christs"), how are we being invited into this Advent ministry in our neighborhoods?

I live in a condominium development. During this time of year when most people get home after dark, and nobody has a yard to work in, it is not easy to get to know my neighbors. People drive into their garages, close the door behind them, and don't come out until they leave for work the next morning. I have found that it takes a lot of intentional work to get to know my neighbors. I have been going around knocking on doors introducing myself to people. I have purposely tried to catch people when their garage doors are open. In the group of 10 units that I live most closely to, there are two African-American homes, two Asian-American homes, two Hispanic-American homes, and four Caucasian homes. Three homes have married couples, two have couples living together who are not married, and five of us are single. People have moved here from

South Carolina, New York, Oregon, Orange County, and Oceanside. If Jesus moved onto my street, what would He do? How is the Holy Spirit already at work in these people's lives, and where do I fit into that? I know I am called to be a witness for Christ in my neighborhood, so I'm still trying to listen and see specifically how God wants me to do that.

This is part of what Advent is all about. It is following the Savior into our communities, living incarnationally, identifying with our neighborhoods, and looking where God's call will lead us. As we move through this Advent season, let's prayerfully look for how we can live rooted and grounded in Christ and in our communities, living out the gospel witness in tangible ways. May God richly bless you this holiday season!