Beloved saints of FPC,

Welcome to advent! We enter this season centered around the hope, peace, joy and love that we find in the enfleshed gospel of our divine God in many ways. The weary world around us can feel like there is nothing to rejoice in—we are met daily with much news that raises anxiety and fear, and little that evokes comfort and hope.

Some of you know that I am involved in a ministry which provides spiritual care to inmates on death row. As a certified spiritual director (thanks FPC for the gift of continued education!), I am able to provide spiritual companionship (at no cost) to an individual facing execution. This is a complex ministry—it holds emotions that I can't even begin to describe. To walk with someone on their journey as they wait to be delivered a death warrant is a striking reminder on a macro and micro level of the immense privilege of simply existing outside the structures of our "justice system."

In this advent, I am sitting in gratitude for hope. My weekly calls/emails with my friend on death row have reminded me of the possibility that exists when you dare to believe in something *good*. My friend and I have nothing in common—we are different in age, race, gender, geographical background, socio-economic status, and anything else you can think of. On top of that, just my answer to the polite question of "how are you?" reveals the stark difference in our lives, an ever-present reminder of the gravity of their context. I didn't think they would be interested in a friendship with someone who has so little knowledge of their lived experience. But I hoped, despite this, that something good would still come of it.

To my joy, something beautiful has blossomed from these conversations—a friendship. Together we pray and talk about the daily rhythms of their life, their family, faith in God, friendships within and out of prison, and hope in the future. This friendship formed because we both expected something *good* from one another. We both had *hope* in what the other could be.

I pray that this season of advent finds you exploring the little moments of hope in your life. That you might dare to imagine the good that can come from someone or something unexpected. That you might be curious in the discovery that awaits when, even as our weary forms bend beneath life's crushing load, we open our hearts to the surprising, complex, and beautiful incarnational movements of a God who continues to believe that *we* are something good.

In Christ,

Pastor Esther