

As our calendar tells us we close the year and as many of us in our work run around completing the projects of 2018, we Christians begin anew. We followers of Jesus spend these last weeks of any year anticipating the birth of Christ and a renewed hope for joy, compassion, renewal and love. We can probably feel pulled at once in two directions—forward and backward—while we rush around checking off the many boxes our lives entail as we take part in many wonderful traditions of the season. I have described to many friends the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas as “the vortex;” it sucks us in and we emerge at the other end somehow rather unkempt and rather spent.

We have given out Advent “coloring” calendars for adults and children to give focus to the days of the season. How many of us can keep themselves from the many distractions that compete for our attention even though I bet lots of you have faithfully read the messages each day and even maybe colored in the blocks. I applaud you for setting aside the frenzy of the December holiday madness! I must admit I am mostly not that disciplined as I feel pulled in many, many directions. I have made peace with the fact that my inner bent toward work-aholism would always push against spiritual practices whatever they may entail. Nonetheless, I remain committed to setting aside the secular things and using whatever means and tools and time God provides to acknowledging the immense meaning the birth of Christ represents. I hope each of you will find some personal space to do the same even though it’s so tough!

In our parish, we face the last weeks of our 100th year not as an ending of anything (although we are certainly honoring our legacy) but as the beginning of what *will* come. We look around us in Old Greenwich and see continuing renewal of life. We can also look beside us in the pew and know that we represent those who have been with us for many years and also newcomers coming fresh to join in. We see people of all ages and stages. What an incredible blessing such a community represents as we collectively and individually discern what God has in store for us as living disciples. Actually, what God has in store for us as “preparers of the Way of Christ.” Yes, that’s also what we are. We are not just worshipping God but we are also making a path for Christ to come into the world. We are also those who bear the same light in the world that Christ brought to us. We are those who “understand.”

This Sunday, as we all participate in the pageant as onlookers to the birth of Christ, we also have the uncomfortable experience of being called a “brood of vipers” by John the Baptist. Remember him? He’s that guy who lived in the desert and wore weird clothes and said that he wasn’t worthy even to untie the sandals of Jesus? And yet, John the Baptist got the starring role in preparing the way of Jesus. We could compare John the Baptist to all kinds of figures but I think it’s mostly important to realize that it totally didn’t matter how he looked. God used him to prepare the way. God found in this unlikely and also very strange person the opportunity for preparing for Jesus.

God needs and wants every one of us to help “prepare the way.” We are those God needs and wants to make a place in the world for the love, compassion, joy and hope that Christ embodied. Let us find our own means of telling this Good News. Let us especially find ways to give this love and hope and joy to those whose lives have involved suffering and struggle and loss. Jesus is coming. Let us be those who tell this truth!