

I. Introduction



A. Welcome to Advent everyone. I trust your Thanksgiving observance was memorable this year, even if it was disappointing for the things you could NOT do.

1. I know very well how essential is the spiritual activity of giving thanks, but to be honest, gratitude has NOT been my primary attitude lately.
2. You want to know how I'VE been feeling in the last 3 weeks?
 - a) How about if I have you HEAR how I've been feeling?
 - b) My favorite Indie rock band The Decemberists have a song which perfectly captures both the simplicity and the complexity of what my life has felt like lately. Just take a listen to the first part of the song ...

First 41 seconds of "Everything Is Awful", from The Decemberists' album I'll Be Your Girl, (Capitol Records, © 2018)

3. If you were confused when you first heard it, so was I
 - a) The bouncy sounds give an initial impression of liveliness, high energy, maybe even joy UNTIL ...
 - b) You catch all the depressing lyrics which contradict the tone of the music. In case you missed it, the song's name: is "Everything is awful"

B. My friends, I've been carrying around this same paradox within me these past few weeks:

1. As a minister of God I feel like I should be demonstrating love, grace, peace, and above all, hope radiating from me
2. All the while, a simmering pot of emotional sludge inside me is repeating the same refrain from the song: *Everything is awful!*
3. Now what would make me say that?? Here's a quick litany:
 - a) Pastor Terry's terminal diagnosis
 - b) Having burials & a memorial for 3 senior adults in the past 10 days

- c) Hearing a rising tide of stories of COVID-19 directly striking WMC households, or close relatives of Waterford people
- d) Hospitals here and across the country being overwhelmed
- e) Schools and essential services that can't function short-staffed
- f) And that's just the beginning: Don't even get me started on the depressing social justice and political developments! ... I'll stop there.

II. As we enter Advent in a world that can feel awful, I urge us to not narrow our gaze only inwardly, as tempting as that is

A. There are myriads of painful situations around the world which could give us a larger perspective this Advent.

1. Thousands of peoples cry out today, with desperation the same as we hear in the voices from Psalm 80 and Isa. 64

Awaken your might; come and save us!

How long, O LORD God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?
(Isa. 64:1; Ps. 80:2, 4 NIV)

2. Out of all those situations, this Sunday I ask us to briefly hold our hurts and heaviness alongside those of the people of Palestine

- a) I recently watched part of a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, who is the Palestinian pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church, in Bethlehem

In it, he names the 3,000 year-old cry of Jews, Muslims and Christians, which is still being heard in the Holy Land.

This cry rises up often among Palestinian people today under an unjust occupation, pushing them to call out, "Weinak, ya Allah?" (Where are you, God?)

This ancient cry echoes that of Jewish people who languished for centuries under conditions of occupation or exile.

- b) This is the cry we just heard in our Scriptures today, a cry that rings in the background every year at this time, drawing us into Advent & Xmas

B. Sometimes recently, when calamity and injustice in our world have about crushed me, I too have cried out "Where are you, God? Weinak, ya Allah?"

1. But then as I bring to mind the suffering Palestinian people, and other marginalized peoples around the world, I have to honestly admit that for myself, NOT everything is awful.

2. After all, I am not ...

- a) Concerned about having stable supplies of food, water and medicine
- b) Subject to going through military checkpoints every few miles on my way to work or school or to buy groceries
- c) Fearful that government forces will bulldoze my house or confiscate

my land

3. Like many of the Palestinian Christians, I'm ready for Jesus to come back, but I want Him to come now!! Weinak, ya Allah!

III. As we embark "On the road" this Advent, I believe the road to readiness requires 2 qualities beginning w/ "H"

A. Honesty in naming painful realities

1. We see this especially in the Psalms of lament, which are cries of protest to God, about suffering God's people were experiencing
 - a) Ps. 80 is an example today, which laments the fall of the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel in 722 BC
 - b) Another well-known one is Ps. 137, which begins "*By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept, when we remembered Zion*". The tragedy there, of course, was the people taken away into exile
2. The point is that these suffering writers were not denying the awful truth. They held nothing back in letting God hear about it!
3. The same is true for us today when we're tempted to sing "Everything is awful". If we deny our situation ... if we don't express how shattered we feel – then we're not ready for God to fully save us

B. Humility in acknowledging our own sins & complicity

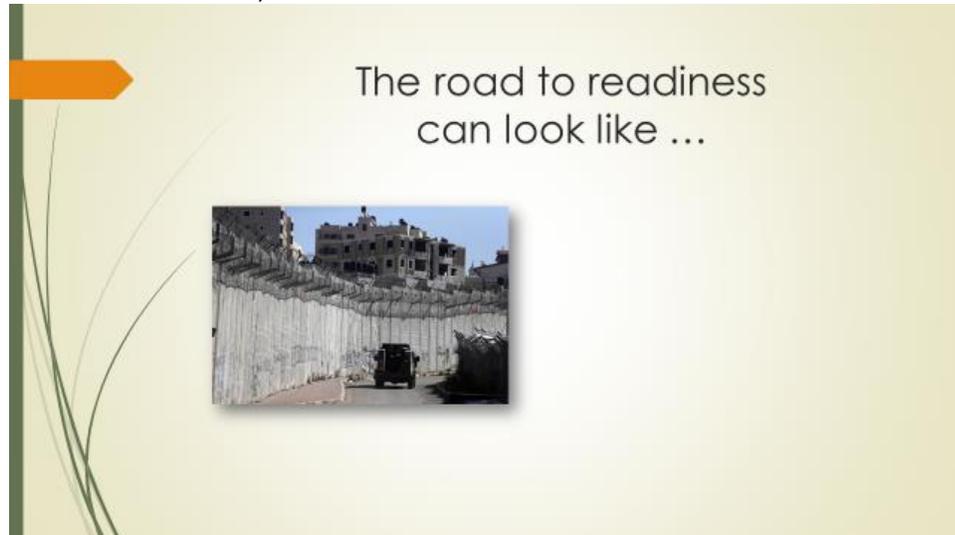
1. This too is very biblical. One of the strongest examples of humility in the Bible is the last 4 and ½ verses of our Isa. 64 text.
 - a) It begins "*But when we continued to sin against [the righteous], you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags ...*"
 - b) The road for God's people, from painful exile back to God's home in Jerusalem, was paved with their humble confessions
2. So too are we prepared to walk the road to readiness when we humbly acknowledge our sins and complicity in injustice
 - a) In humility let us admit to God when we have sinned against others who were made in God's likeness
 - b) When we see and hear about the long sufferings of Palestinians, and Native Americans, and African Americans and immigrants ... Let us not only cry out "Where are you, God?"
 - c) Let us also confess how we with our silence, with our tax dollars and investment dollars and with our votes ... we are also complicit in the things we lament

IV. Conclusion

A. Friends, there isn't just one road to readiness for the coming

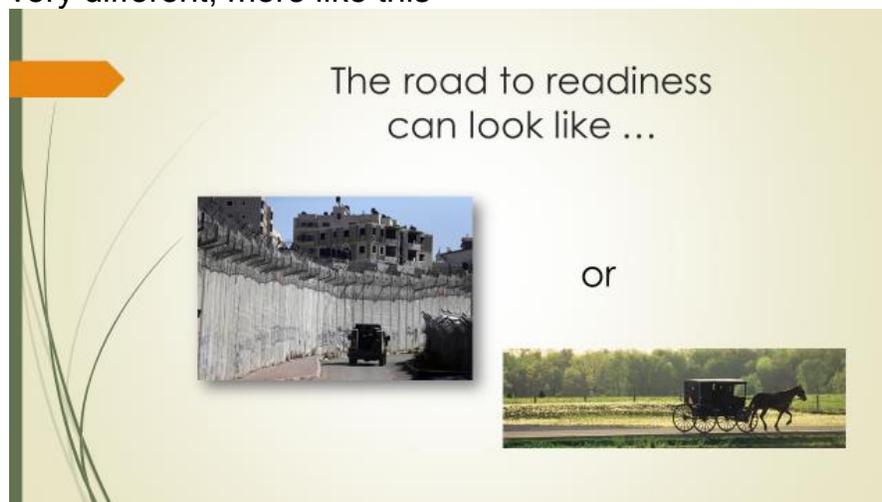
of Jesus

1. That road is lived out in many different ways and it has vastly different appearances
2. On one hand, sometimes that road looks like this



- a) Not so far from today's Bethlehem, where streets and alleys are overshadowed by a 24-foot Israeli separation wall that keeps Palestinians from going to work or to the hospital or to see family
- b) Although we ourselves aren't walking that road, let us not forget our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, and other oppressed people around the world, who travel that road every day

3. And much closer to home, sometimes the road to readiness looks very different, more like this



- a) A serene almost idyllic county road in Amish country ... This is a nearly identical scene to what I took in out at the cemetery where Henry Mast was buried just over a week ago
- b) Some of us literally live on such a road, or metaphorically our road is rather peaceful, safe and not controlled by others

4. But whatever our road to readiness for Jesus looks like, God calls us to walk it with honesty and humility, even if we are crying out, "Weinak ya Allah?"

B. As I myself enter this Advent season, I want to show you 2 tangible things I will keep nearby me:

1. This is the Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2020, which is a devotional resource for Advent and Christmas, written by Palestinian Christians

- a) It provides the unique perspectives of how Christians living under occupation today prepare themselves for the Savior who was born 2K years ago, literally down the road from them
- b) If you're interested in this Palestinian Advent devotional, it's available through the Friends of Sabeel North America, on their website fosna.org (f-o-s-n-a)
- c) I hope this resource keeps my heart connected to the millions around the world whose road looks like the first image on your screen

2. The other thing to show you is this sprig of wheat

- a) I was given this wheat by Henry Mast's family after his burial service. It was part of a larger wheat arrangement that was on Henry's casket
- b) Having the sprig of wheat nearby me in Advent will first of all remind me of the goodness and wholeness of life that God gives us each day.
- c) It will also remind me of the dear people I know whose road looks a little more like the 2nd image on the screen

C. Please join me in my own Advent 1 prayer of Waterford, drawing from Isa. 64:8-9

O Eternal One, who is known as Ha Shem, Allah, and God, after we've shed our tears and cried out in our pain, "Weinak, ya Allah?" then we come back and humbly say,

*Yet you LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.*

Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever.

*Oh, look on us, we pray, ... as we approach on the road to readiness ...
for we are all your people. Amen*