

Year C, December 2, 2018
1 Advent
Christ Church, Mexia

Christianity Today ran a story a little over 24 years ago about George H.W. Bush, may his soul rest in peace. At that time, he was serving as Vice President and represented the US at the funeral of the former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. "Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband." (Gary Thomas, 10/3/94)

Today with the theme of hope in the forefront, imagine her hope and her courage at that moment. And we should recall that C.S. Lewis in his *Mere Christianity* defined hope as: "A continual looking forward to the eternal world."

Wesley Avram, a Presbyterian minister, speaking about our gospel reading today, notes that Jesus warns that the world is a scary place, but says don't worry about it. Just go about your business in the midst of it, with your hope secure. And then he observes: "And with this (scripture) the church begins a new year, asked to begin afresh, not just on a calendar, but in individual hearts, in relationships, in congregations, and in our yearning for a promise worth living for. Hearers of this passage are bidden to live their lives of faithful, active waiting in the *meantime* because they hear again the name of the One who holds them in the *ending* time." Jesus is our hope!

And so, we begin to recall anew today that: "This Jesus we follow was born as a homeless traveler, whose family struggled to find welcome (in his early years). This Jesus we follow lived and ministered in poverty, at the mercy and generosity of others. This Jesus we follow offered no exceptions (*no exceptions*) to his table of hospitality. This Jesus we follow held more power than anyone on the planet – before

or since – yet never once used the force of that power in the face of oppression, or violence, or even his own torture and execution.” (Fr. Bates) He used that power only for good, such as healing. And Jesus told us time and again to not fear, but rather to live in hope.

Regardless of what the world does, we simply need to recall that: “The very heart of Christianity is inclusion and welcome and invitation. It is trust and contentment and hope that cannot be overtaken. It is serving and yielding and sacrificing. (And no, that may not sound enticing, especially in our culture. However, Christianity) is not a scared narcissism that vilifies the other, relentlessly accumulates material goods and wealth, and seeks power or prestige.” These latter things are things we need to avoid, to struggle against.

As we prepare to celebrate the incarnation, the birth, of Jesus and while we wait in the hope of his coming again, let us not lose sight of the fact that Jesus represents forgiveness, love and eternal life. If we can’t find hope in that, there is something wrong.

(silence)

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.