

## **DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY**

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020**

The Fourth Sunday of Advent was our annual tradition to get our Christmas tree. Regardless of the weather, we would drive with all four children along with another couple and their four children to Bigelow to look for a Christmas tree, a cedar tree in the woods at Grandma's farm. We did not cut it. We dug it up with shovels, put it in a foot tub, fill it with dirt, load it in the truck and bring it home, drag it into the house . . . Kept it watered and after Christmas, drag it outside, dig a hole and plant it. Now some years like this year there's plenty of time between the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent and Christmas Day. But some years, we'd be digging up a tree on Christmas Eve in the rain. . . with eight kids, four adults walking through the wood. . . with shovels, blankets, wagons, snacks, hats and gloves . . . my feet are wet, here's one, no this one... it's my turn to pick one. I'm hungry, I've got to go to the bathroom, I'm cold. Some years it worked . . . and some years . . . we'd say to ourselves no more. We are getting a fake tree next year. In other words, we were saying to ourselves, where is God in all this???

In the First Reading, King David thought he knew right where he wanted to find God. David was living quite comfortably in his luxurious palace. The Israelite kingdom was unified and at peace. So, King David turns his attention to God and wants to build God not just a temple but a showplace, a testament to his power and wealth. David shared his plan with his court prophet Nathan, but God told Nathan: "Let me see if I understand . . . David wants to build me a fine temple so he can tell me, God, where to live? Prophet Nathan, please remind David that I, God have always been with the people, and I called David, the simple shepherd and the youngest of eight sons of Jesse. I, God who gifted David with skills and talents, who gave David the courage to overcome the Goliaths on the battlefield. . . has David forgotten that the peaceful times and the seat of leadership that he occupies, is only by the grace of God?" Whatever kind of structure David planned to build would not be suitable for God.

David believed he had all the externals settled and organized and then, he was ready to find a place for God. David had forgotten that God was right there with him while he fought all his battles in good times and bad. And for all his days, David was left with the question, what is a suitable house for God?

Our Gospel reveals the answer. The only appropriate dwelling place for God is the human heart.

In the Gospel even Mary "was greatly troubled" . . . "she pondered what...this might mean" . . . She said "...how can this be." But the angel Gabriel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary . . ."

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

The unsettled chaos of the world in which Jesus was born 2000 years ago and in the midst of such uncertainty and questions in the lives of Mary and Joseph . . . Emmanuel, God was with them. And in this unsettled world in which we live... with COVID-19, political unrest and divided people and worshipping from home...Emmanuel... God is with us.

In these final days of Advent, offer to God the only place that God wants to reside: our hearts. We don't have to wait until everything is done and our lives are in order. God is found in the midst of chaos . . . but ultimately, we pray, God is in my heart and in your heart.

Emmanuel . . . God is with us.