

‘Putting Our House in Order’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
December 6, 2015

based on Philippians 1:3:11 and Luke 3:1-6

Cleaning house...who likes to do it? Vacuuming, dusting, putting things away, sorting through things to keep or throw away (or recycle), scrubbing, and polishing. Very few people I know say, “I can’t wait for Saturday so I can clean my house!”

But I think we’ve all seen those television programs that show us what happens when we never clean or straighten or throw things out. We turn into a form of hoarders.

Cleaning house is one of those ‘have-to-do’ things we can put off and put off, but eventually you have to at least throw out the old moldy food in the refrigerator.

We can look at Advent as a time of cleaning house. Its part of what we do to prepare for a guest...and we know the guest will arrive on Dec. 25.

Cleaning house...we can do that literally; or we can clean and straighten our spiritual home...our hearts and our minds.

Advent is when we take the time and make the effort to clean our hearts and minds for the day of Christ. Purging ourselves of bad habits and misplaced priorities helps ready us for the true reason for this beautiful time of preparation.

Lucky for us, we know the date...Dec. 25. But John the Baptist and Saint Paul only knew of the coming promise...not the actual date.

Therefore their house cleaning had to be done as a daily occurrence. Repentance and prayer were vital to their spiritual house cleaning so that their “love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

Theirs was a form of spiritual cleansing that helps US rid ourselves of the temptations, distractions, or mis-guided secular and political positions that keep us from ‘the glory and praise of God’. Or that keeps us from helping to build God’s kingdom...Or inhibits our willingness to participate in the transformation of evil, hate and greed into goodness, love, and generosity.

The Bible often refers to that as transforming darkness into light.

That’s the advent/cleaning house theme is now wrapped up in a pretty box with glittery bow and ribbon. It even has a name tag on it with “Merry Christmas!” printed next to a scenic Christmas tree laden with lights and surrounded by gifts.

That’s the antiseptic Advent. The antiseptic Advent is when we use that kind of Advent as a distraction that keeps Advent ethereal and not as a practiced discipline.

But our world is not that ethereal. Our world competes with our spiritual well being on a daily basis.

Do you know how many Sundays this year I’ve stood here recounting the violent horror of a mass shooting? Literally...too many to count.

- Charleston
- Roseburg
- Colorado Springs
- Rochester, and now
- San Bernardino

I haven't even come close to mentioning them all.

The Washington Post reported, that "Mass shootings have happened almost every day in America this year — often more than once a day. They happen in backyards and at block parties, in mansions and housing projects, in quiet neighborhoods and at rowdy bars, at schools, restaurants, churches, gas stations and grocery stores. They are random, and they are premeditated. They happen during dice games, family dinners, funerals and sweet sixteens."

It's enough to scare the bajeebers out of anyone.

One of the more disturbing reports of last week's terror attack in San Bernardino was how complacent most Americans have become to the horrific events when mass shootings occur. I could see it on Facebook. Hardly a single comment!

I'm not going to stand up here and tout gun legislation...but I do believe there is something very unclean in our country (and world) that needs to be put in order...or at the very least put in perspective.

The anxiety in our society is nerve-wracking, to say the least.

We simply have no more quiet time to filter out the world's noise and anxiety.

Or do we?

We might not have a snowball's chance in (well, you know where) of changing the dominant worldview that tells us the world is a scary and unjust place...but what we do have is a Savior who preached truth to power and was the best spiritual house-cleaner I know!

We have the time...if we make it.

We have the space...if we honor it.

We have the energy...if we have the passion for it.

We have the will...if we choose to place our faith and trust on Jesus' message of love and reconciliation.

I think that's what Isaiah was saying (that John the Baptist quoted):

Prepare the way of the Lord. (find the time)

Every gully shall be filled up,

every mountain shall be leveled. (make the space holy)

The crooked shall be straightened,

and the rough road shall be smoothed,

and all the human race shall see

the salvation of our God! (live the passion)

Advent has a very simple reason behind it: that is to carve out the time and space and energy and will to clean out our spiritual homes.

In spiritual terms:

- Place the most important thing first in your life;
- let go of what doesn't last;
- share what will help;
- and (most importantly) find what is the source of joy in your life

and hang onto that...especially when someone else tries to convince you the world is a scary place...and that there's no room for baby named Jesus.

Any long journey starts with a single step. Let the transformation of the world begin with you.

...and always, no matter what, remember to pray with joy in every one of your prayers.

Let us pray:

[Rev. Nancy Raca is now lifting the Prayer for the People during worship.]