

Advent 1 09

How's your posture?

Did you get marks for posture when you went to school? I remember there was a place on the back of our report cards for things like cleanliness, attitude, music, and posture. AND I remember that in grade 6 I got "not satisfactory" on all of those.

All four.

Cleanliness: We used to find pop bottles in the ditches on our way to school, and cash them in for money to buy Beatles bubble gum cards. My hands would be dirty I guess!

Attitude: I though everything was stupid in grade 6.

Music: I hated music. Our teacher, Mr Lavioe, made us sing "won't you come home Bill Bailey" which is the dumbest song ever, and I just made my mouth move. Apparently he noticed.

Posture. I can't remember about that but apparently it was bad. That doesn't surprise me though because in grade 6 I felt very bad about myself, and of course your body reflects that.

You can tell a lot about people by their posture. Are they afraid? Relaxed? Self conscious?

How's your posture??

Maybe it's bad right now because of things going on in your life. Maybe you've got all you can handle right now and your body says....just stay away, don't touch me. I can handle this if you leave me alone.

Or maybe you're going through a series of tough things and you're bowed down, literally – afraid to look up for fear of what else might be headed your way.

OR it might be as simple as you have a sore back or leg. Never make assumptions.

On the other hand, maybe you're standing straight, feeling good about yourself and others....not too straight though, that's another kind of trouble....just relaxed and ready to get on with living and enjoying today.

What kind of posture do you have right now? Is that typical of you? What kind do you normally have?

Luke is talking about posture as well.

Read 21: 25-28

“Now when these things begin to take place, stand up, and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing nigh”

How do we as a people face life?

How do we face the troubles around us and within us, and how do we face the coming of God into the world?

Standing.

With heads and hands raised.

This is the posture of God’s faithful people. Standing, with raised heads and hands, because our redemption is near.

This is an attitude – a posture – of hope.

Hope is the theme of the first Sunday of Advent. Hope.

Not the kind of hope where you say “I hope it doesn’t snow” or “I hope I win the lottery”

I once worked with some teenagers on the topic of friendship and asked them to fill out this little form. My best friend is_____. That person is my best friend because

I’ll never forget one girl who said “Amanda is my best friend because she makes me feel hopeful” Isn’t that beautiful? I would love to be able to give a gift of friendship like that to someone. Are there people who do that for you??

Hope is, at least in part, an attitude toward the future. It’s the way we look at the future – the way we face it.

And I DON’T mean, either, a kind of whistling-in-the-dark “everything’s just rosy” sort of thing. The truth is we simply don’t know what the future holds. We’re almost guaranteed it’s not going to be all roses. One thing, however, is true about life; it’s always changing. That’s scary but hopeful too. WHO KNOWS what’s around the corner? Who knows what exciting people you might meet, or what might happen? Bad things might happen - yes. But good things you never expected might too.

The truly hopeful person is not stupid – but looks to the future knowing that whatever else it holds, it is GOD’S future. God will be there and no matter what God will be with us. That’s what hope is. Facing the future that way. Standing. Heads up. Arms raised. Looking the future squarely in the face, knowing that the God who created the world, who was with us in Exodus and Exile, who raised Christ Jesus from the dead and who walks with us every step of the way

THAT GOD is Lord of the future. The future can be faces. It belongs to God..

That's hope.

Centuries ago a woman called Julian of Norwich said "all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" Centuries later, Fanny Crosby said "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine." Much the same message.

All shall be well. Blessed assurance. This is not naïve, finger-crossing wishing but rather the confident assurance that God is God. That God is the Alpha and Omega, God, who was there at the beginning, will be there at the end – that in the end, as Paul says, everything will be handed over to God, completely and fully.

All shall be well. Yes, it shall. We know God now, and so we can trust God for the future.

We stand with heads raised, when others might be confused or afraid.

(read verses 25 and 26)

We can be confused and afraid too because we know that God is with us in our confusion and fear, and because we know that God is stronger than both those things.

We are at the beginning of the season of Advent. Advent means "coming" or "arrival" – a time when we focus on the waiting, the expectancy, the promise of the One who is to come into the world. God came once and for all in Bethlehem, comes again daily to us personally and socially – and is coming again some day to claim the whole universe. It includes much more than just waiting for Christmas. It's an ongoing expectation: "Christ has come, Christ is coming, Christ will come again"

That is both the promise and the mystery of Advent. It is God's doing. It is of such significance, that the entire universe shakes with the sighing.

Our posture needs to be one of standing ready. "Stand up and raise your heads" Jesus says.

Stand up. Stand confident – the way a person does who is self assured. You are loved. You are capable and worthwhile. You are treasured. Stand proud and tall, knowing that.

Stand ready to walk or run – whatever the work God needs you to do. Jeremiah says that the righteous branch of David will bring justice and righteousness in the land. Jesus is that Branch. He is bringing justice and righteousness, and he needs people ready and willing to work with him to bring it about.

Stand up. Ready to work.

Justice and righteousness aren't just religious sounding words; they have real, concrete meaning. Personal, social, political, economic, ecological. There is LOTS of work to be

done at all levels. So let's get on our feet heads up, ready to work. You know how people say "just want to give you the heads up on this"? Well, we're on our feet here, God has given us the heads up. Peace and justice are what it's all about. In the end, that's what's coming. Peace and hope and love and joy....

God is saying "Just giving you the heads up – this is what I'm about."

And to a world where sometimes the forces of death seems stronger than the forces of life...to a world where some wait in pain for the Light to come....where the stable lies cold and empty waiting for new life to be born...

We're saying

"Just giving you the heads up – in the end, life wins, and the Light will come"

Stand up, heads raised. Arms raised too in openness and thanksgiving. A welcoming and giving posture. Ready to receive and welcome new people, new ideas. Who KNOWS when you're entertaining angels? A posture of hope.

Looking to the future, expecting God to be there. Eyes wide open to see what gifts and opportunities there will be for you

And

Should the future include pain, ready to see and welcome the God who will stand by you in that pain.

Pay attention to your posture this week. Adopt the posture of those who wait, in the assurance of God's amazing love – those who stand ready to work for justice – those who lift up hands in thanksgiving and those who stand, faces toward the future – the future that belongs to God.

Stand in the posture of hope; ready to be vehicles of hope to a frightened world – the future is in God's hands, and in the end, all will be well.

May it be so.

Amen.