

THE SILENT NIGHT PROJECT

Sing on November 28

SERMON NOTES

Unexpected Peace

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November 28, 2010

By Beth Baskin

These sermon notes were written for the Silent Night Project, produced by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. All Canadian Anglicans are encouraged to film themselves singing “Silent Night” on Nov. 28, and these notes designed as suggestions for how to incorporate Advent and hymn themes into a sermon on that day. Please see the website to learn more about the Silent Night Project: www.anglican.ca/silentnight

Two years ago, Canadian Anglicans were encouraged to sing “Amazing Grace” and sing they did—in formal choirs, in Sunday School classes, and in nursing homes. Over 500 videos were sent in and incorporated into a documentary, *Amazing Together*. Together we raised over \$95,000 that is being used by the Council of the North to save lives through suicide prevention work.

This time we are being invited to sing “Silent Night” and offer our toonies to support Anglican military chaplains who minister to the women and men of the Canadian Forces. If you wish to discuss the work they do and how this project is supporting their work you will find some videos on www.anglican.ca/silentnight and more information on their website www.anglican.ca/amo/

Preparation

I will say the obvious first:

- Read the readings for Advent I year A: <http://l.anglican.ca/b8p3gN>
- Read the lyrics for “Silent Night”: <http://l.anglican.ca/aD73yh> [PDF]

Usually at this point I take some time to ponder the readings and in this case the lyrics. They rattle around in my brain for a few hours or a few days. I take note of what they remind me of and the connections I make to my own experience and those of the community I am preaching to.

Just sing “Silent Night” and upload your video at anglican.ca/silentnight
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From the producers of the Amazing Grace Project, the Anglican Church of Canada



Then I find it useful to see what others have had to say on the subject:

- Text this week www.textweek.com is a great source for exegesis on the readings and provides links to many other people's thoughts
- The story of the World War I truce begun by the singing of "Silent Night" can be found at www.anglican.ca/silentnight
- I found the following essay insightful:

"Bringing Heaven to Earth Here and Now," a guest essay by Joan Roughgarden, author of *Evolution and Christian Faith; Reflections of an Evolutionary Biologist* (2006). The piece is available here: www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20071126JJ.shtml

Ideas for reflection

Now I offer some of my own reflections:

- The gospel speaks of not knowing, but still being prepared for the unexpected. I wonder—I really wonder—if I can be prepared for unexpected. I know that I can cope with it and even thrive in the face of unexpected challenges, but is that really the same as being prepared?
- When that first German soldier sang *Stille nacht, heilige nacht* was he prepared to hear *Silent Night, holy night* sung back to him? Was that first English soldier prepared to sing? Had he done his warm-up scales, reviewed the music, found the right note? I expect not, but he responded. I suspect that he responded at a heart level. His brain heard that familiar melody and his heart responded to an offer of beauty, hope, and ultimately, of peace.
- Those soldiers had been prepared even in the midst of war to open themselves up to compassion and hope. Somewhere in their past they had been nurtured by song and tradition. They had been shown how to be human and to connect to another human being regardless of physical location or circumstances. They may not have expected a truce that night or have been prepared to cross into no man's land to bury the dead and share their care packages, but they had been taught to be human and to embrace an offer of compassion and peace.
- Have we been prepared and are we preparing our children to respond to the unexpected? Can we appreciate those quiet moments in the schoolyard before the bell rings at day's end? Do we acknowledge God in that brief quiet? I think being prepared for the unexpected is embracing what you are offered, taking what is given and enjoying it to the fullest. The unexpected hug from the cool teenager or a quiet evening at home with a loved one when suddenly the children are elsewhere. Being prepared for the unexpected is dealing with the bad stuff in life, like accidents and unknown illnesses. It is drawing on your inner strength, tapping into your faith, calling on your God to be all that you can be in the face of devastating news.
- The Isaiah passage speaks of turning swords into ploughshares and "learning of war no more." It gives hope of a future where children do not bully, and adults do not intentionally harm themselves or one another and nations do not go to war. Do we really expect this? Do we really think our families can be places of peace and our schoolyards arenas for hope and compassion? Or will peace be unexpected? And if it is unexpected, will we know how to be in that moment?

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- I think of Mary and Jesus as described in the first verse of “Silent Night” and remember my first moments of being alone with my own child. The awesome responsibility of knowing that I had to care for this new human being. The incredible warmth and comfort of a small gift of God. We don’t know what it was like where Jesus was born, but it doesn’t really matter because Mary probably experienced that nearly universal feeling of overwhelming love and peace. This first verse gives words to what can only be imagined:

“Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin
mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.”

- Our task as people of faith is create moments of peace and embrace them when they present themselves, however unexpectedly. The challenge is that there is no blueprint for world peace or even peace within the family, but if we can open ourselves up to the unexpected and embrace our enemy when they sing a familiar melody we are on our way to the kind of peace I believe God intends.

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