



Southeastern Minnesota Synod

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



December 9, 2021

Driving back from a synod event the other day I listened to Krista Tippet interview Bryan Stevenson for her On Being radio program. Stevenson, a lawyer and author, is the founder and director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. As the conversation began, he told this story:

My great-grandfather was enslaved in Caroline County, Virginia, and learned to read while enslaved. And I never really thought about that until later. But **I just started thinking about the kind of hope**, the kind of vision it took to believe that one day, you're going to be free, **even when nothing around you indicates that freedom is likely** for enslaved Black people in Virginia in the 1850s.^[1] (emphasis added)

As I was waking up to the alarm clock radio the other morning, I heard another voice reflect that Christians have long understood dawn is on the other side of even the deepest night.

These pieces of shared wisdom have me meditating on the Advent theme of hope. Hope as a steadfast knowledge that the reality which surrounds us is not the only reality there is. I am particularly struck by the fortitude of hope described above: a man whose hope and vision could see beyond the depravity of others' sin and the confines that sin manufactured.

What strikes me this particular Advent season is that sometimes hope must be defiant. This is a truth I've learned from Stevenson's recounting. When all that surrounds us, our visible reality, gives us little reason to hope, we, the people of God, hope anyway.

Our hope is in Christ.

I fear that might sound trivial. If it does it might be because we have allowed ourselves to become too familiar with the miraculous.

We hope because we know that Christ has come and Christ is coming. We hope because we know the presence of *God with us* is the only thing with the power to transform our lives, our communities...indeed the whole of the cosmos.

And our hope is realized. Not yet fully and sometimes only in glimpses, but realized still. Even when it seems all earthly signs point to hope misplaced, we know, because of what God has done in Christ, our hope is not in vain. Indeed, this current reality, in all its glory and all its mess, is not all there is. There is yet a fullness of the kingdom coming that we can only scarcely imagine.

I am struck by the kind of hope Stevenson's great-grandfather embodied. A hope which believed his current reality would not be his only reality and, in the fortitude of that hope, lived in preparation for the life to come.

Isn't this what the apocalyptic readings of Advent are, in part, about? They serve as a call to live in a transformed way. They invite us to be in tangible preparation for the coming of Christ and the fullness of the kingdom of God. They call us to live and embody defiant hope.

Dear church, I pray this Advent season we prepare our hearts and *our lives* for the coming of Christ even as we proclaim Christ has come, Christ is here, and Christ will come again.

In Christ,



Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

¹² and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,

the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;

in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:12-13, NRSV

[¹] Stevenson's entire interview with Tippet can be found at: <https://onbeing.org/programs/bryan-stevenson-finding-the-courage-for-whats-redemptive/>