

TRAGEDY IN THE ADVENT SEASON OF HOPE, LOVE, JOY AND PEACE

By Bryan McKee, December 15, 2020

Prologue

The following reflection was inspired by the TMH Live discussion on December 6, 2020, with Danielle Strickland and Scott Ericson and the After Party with Danielle, Arron White, Mellissa, and Quincy. My first thoughts were to write about my life which currently spans 70 years. I quickly realized that would require at least four lengthy books. Instead, I have tried to keep this reflection to only encompass recent life events around the season of Advent. The events recalled are a synopsis of the tragedies I have endured during Advents past. It is my hope that by reading this reflection you will be able find God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit at work in your lives during times of tragedy.

Reflection - Tragedy in the Advent Season of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace

Advent marks the beginning of a New Year for Christians around the world. It is a time where we reflect on God's Hope and Love for us, the Joy experienced in us at the Celebration of Jesus Birth, and the Holy Spirit's Peace within us. We should be familiar with the biblical story of Jesus' birth. How the angel Gabrielle appeared to Mary and the struggle she and Joseph endured before going to Bethlehem. We know the conditions they faced giving birth in a stable and how they had to flee to Egypt to save Jesus from death at the hands of King Herod.

Each Advent we are asked to examine through God's Hope, Love, Joy and Peace, which He freely gives to us, our life experiences. We are asked to find where God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit have helped us during our life's journey. We are asked to repent, forgive and be forgiven for the wrongs we have committed. We are asked to acquire God's Hope for us in the future. We are asked to receive the Love of Jesus and spread that love to others. We are asked to experience the Joy of Jesus' Birth and share that Joy with others. We are asked to receive the Holy Spirit's Peace and spread His Peace throughout the world.

All too often, our experience is blocked by tragedy, loss, hopelessness, loneliness, anger, and fear. We often wonder if God has abandoned us or we abandon Him. We withdraw into ourselves, from our family and friends. All we feel is the hurt and pain, the sadness and loneliness. Some may turn to alcohol, and drugs while others turn it all into anger and hatred towards others. Some may even feel hopeless and unwanted and some may long for death.

I have experienced most of these feelings at some time in my life. Each time something miraculous has turned me around and brought me back to a sense of need to find God again and let him take control and lead me back to a normal life. I believe this was because I was born

and raised to believe in God and His Son, my Lord and Savior and the Holy spirit which He gave to all who believe in Him.

During the Advent season I have been devastated on two different occasions by tragedies. The first occurred on December 10, 1990 when my father died after a two-year battle with cancer. While his death was tragic the family was devastated but we were uplifted by those who attended his funeral and the compassion they showed for weeks after. The family helped each other by recanting stories of my father. The church people visited and offered prayers and brought food for my mother. The funeral home and minister visited and prayed and called several times.

Now, thirty years later, I am personally consoled by the memory of the miracle I saw the night my father died. I had taken my mother for a coffee while my sister took her spot sitting by my father's bedside. We sat in the waiting room two floors below my father's room. The window looked out on his wing of the hospital and you could see the light on in his room. I sat facing the window. My mother sat facing me. We had just finished our coffee when I saw a streak of light come down from the sky, toward my father's window and then reverse even brighter back into the black starry lit sky. I believe to this day, that God had sent an angel to retrieve my father's soul and take him to heaven.

The second tragedy occurred three years later, on Dec. 25, 1993. I had taken my mother to midnight Communion Service at my church and then to my sister's where she was going to stay to celebrate Christmas morning. After unloading gifts for my sister's family and loading gifts for my family, my sister and I stood talking by the car. Suddenly, my mother rushed out, calling, "I thought you had left without saying good-bye." She then wrapped her arms around me and gave me the biggest and longest hug that I can remember. After saying it was getting late and I had to go, she pulled, stood on her toes, she was only five foot tall, and gave me a kiss on the cheek.

The following morning at precisely 7:00 AM the phone rang. It was my sister saying my mother had died during the night. Our family rushed over, and we saw mother lying peacefully on the sofa in front of the Christmas Tree, clutching the crucifix she always wore around her neck. We all crowded into the kitchen and waited for the coroner and funeral director to arrive and take her body. The coroner deemed she had died from a massive heart attack and no autopsy was necessary.

My sister prepared lunch for all of us then we left to go to mother's house. We had intended to gather there for our usual family Christmas dinner. When my family arrived, we found my sister had already begun preparing dinner. The turkey was in the oven and she was fixing vegetables. My mother had already baked cakes for dessert. We sat around telling stories and opening Christmas gifts from mom until dinner was ready. Following dinner, we all pitched in to clean-up before heading home. We divided up the leftovers and when it came to the cake I said, "Better get out the tape measure." We all knew what that meant and laughed. Mom had always

made certain that everyone received an equal amount by using a tape measure before making an accurate cut.

We all experience pain in our lives, be it physical, emotional, loss of job, or a loved one, sadness, melancholy, loneliness, or depression. During the Advent and Christmas seasons we may experience these the most, sometimes for years. We may question where God is in all of this. We may even blame God for our pain. We lament by weeping, crying, howling, moaning and groaning. We feel helpless. We may not know how to help ourselves.

As Christians we can prepare ourselves for tragedy and the pain it brings. We can prepare by seeking God through honest prayer, by telling Him we are hurting and need his help. We can seek God by attending worship and joining a church where we can make new friendships. We can surrender ourselves to Jesus and join in the Celebration of His Life. We can begin to help others who are hurting. God is here with us through the Holy Spirit. God is listening to our lament. We can not avoid pain. Pain is a gift from God to help bring us closer to Him.

Look at the pain Mary and Joseph endured guided by the directions from God. The ridicule from others because she was pregnant and not married to Joseph. The long trip to Bethlehem, only to be told that the Inn was full, and they were relegated to the stable. The pain of childbirth to bring forth God's Gift to us, Jesus his Son who would become our Savior. The trip to Egypt across the wilderness to save the Baby Jesus from death at the hands of King Herod and finally, after years in Egypt, returning to settle in Nazareth following Herod's death.

Surely, we can overcome the tragedies, pain, and loss we experience by seeking God through prayer. God will provide us with His Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. He will provide us His light to guide us through the darkness. God treats us all equally and only asks us to Love Him as He loves us and to share His love with everyone we meet. Just as my mother cut the cake equally to show that she loved us all equally as we loved her.