

Editor's Note: During the seasons of Advent and Lent we will be featuring a variety of voices from the community in our bulletin.

**Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent
By Stephanie Weller Hanson**

We Have Found Safety

What are we to make of Jesus in the temple prophesying the end of the world? It's stark, confusing and a little unnerving. What does it mean for us in 2021? In the last two years, we've had a taste of global trouble through the pandemic. Our world has changed in unexpected ways. We practice social distancing and wear masks. Some of us lost our jobs. We stopped traveling. We grieve for all the lives lost. Most of us know someone who's had Covid, and many of us have had it ourselves. It seems as if the pandemic has helped to spawn worsening division in our nation. We are collectively out of sync with the way the world was before Covid hit, and we don't know when or if we'll get the old normal back. That's new and scary.

In such difficult and unsure times, Jesus is asking us to be self-aware, to recognize those things which can drain away our love for God and wither our engagement in the world. Our noble intentions can become blighted by a parade of entertaining distractions, by anxiety and, yes, by "carousing and drunkenness." We must be awake and clear-eyed about the problems in our country and the world. We must know our Christian ethics and hold to them. We are called to love God and to have compassion for all, especially those in need. We are called to stand for the defenseless. But Jesus reminds us that even when we're most afraid of the future, we are to stand erect and raise our heads, because our redemption is at hand.

Advent is a time of preparation. Externally, it's getting ourselves and our families ready for Christmas. But it's what we do on the interior that truly matters. We listen. We wait. We trust. We expect the good to show itself. We look for the small, sometimes hidden signs of God's abiding presence among us.

This is the last stanza of the poem "Safety" by Rupert Brooke, a British poet who died early in World War I.

*We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house which is not for Time's throwing,
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going.
Secretly armed against all death's endeavor:
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.*