

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-11, 16

"...I have been with you wherever you went."

REFLECT:

The season of Advent is drawing to a close... or perhaps it's more appropriate to say to a climax: the days of celebrating the arrival of Jesus, God-with-us, are almost upon us. In fact at this end of Advent the edges get a bit blurry anyway; carol services (such as they are in this unusual year) are already underway, and in our house we've already watched our festive favourites *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Muppets Christmas Carol* and broken into the mince pies, port and mulled wine.

It goes without saying that it will be a different sort of a Christmas this year, as a very different sort of a year draws to a close. Although the rules are still set to relax a little for the festive period,

the news brings daily warnings from experts who remind us that this easing will come at a price. Whatever decisions we make for ourselves and our families, we know that there will be a cost one way or another. And we're all continuing to live with loss and a level of background anxiety that takes a toll in different ways.

Over the past week I've been making and wrapping presents for my nieces and nephews in the knowledge that this year I won't get to see them open them. For our churches, Christmas would normally be one time of year when our buildings are at full capacity and we can really raise the roof with hearty singing. While it's been wonderful to have some services in church again I think we all feel this loss. The months that have passed since my ordination in January have not unfolded as hoped or expected. Plans and ambitions, for all of us, have had to be put on hold or put to bed.

The reading I've chosen from the lectionary for us this week might not, on the face of it, seem very Christmassy. It's an Old Testament account of a conversation between King David, the prophet Nathan and God, on the subject whether to build a temple to house the ark of the covenant. God's response, however, seems to speak clearly into our own situation, and set the scene beautifully for the wondrous gift of the incarnation.

God challenges David's (and thereby our) assumptions about what God desires and where God resides. The grand designs we hold, even with 'holy' intentions, bely our ambitions, not God's. As much as we seek to lift God up, God continues to be found 'on the ground', with the people. As much as we seek to delineate sacred space, God is nomadic, moving with and among us. And as much as we try to define God with words, creeds, doctrines, God is free, untamable, surprising.

As we reflect on and lament the year that has passed, may we hear the truth in God's word: "...I have been with you" (v.9). And as we turn towards Christmas and beyond, may we experience the gift of Love born among us; into the stench of a stable, into dark and dangerous times, into our frailty and confusion. The gift of Emmanuel: God with us.

PRAY:

- For those living in tents, shanty-towns and refugee camps.
- For all whose loneliness or loss will be compounded by Christmas.
- For God to continue to surprise us.

SING:

All of your favourite carols! Because as yet there are no rules against singing in the shower.

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.