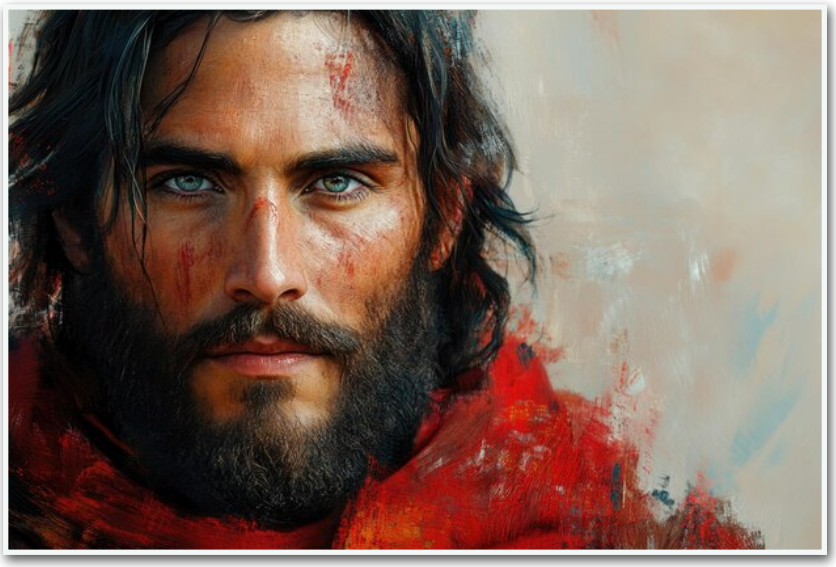
For the Journey

Dec. 11, 2025 - Rev. Dave Crawford

“Our dear Lord Christ is everywhere in the world an annoying



preacher. The gospel will never fare otherwise. It is and it will be a message at which offence is taken, not by the lowly, but by the most saintly and most pious, the wisest and the mightiest on earth, as experience teaches us.”

- *Martin Luther, from a sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Advent, 1544.*

Evidence of the mightiest taking offence at being challenged with truth has been plentiful over the past few weeks. Whether we happen to be Canadian or American, Republican-leaning or Democrat, most of us have been appalled by the current U.S. President’s outbursts toward journalists on live television. We may not have the greatest respect for modern media, or at least we may have questions, doubts sometimes, but we know when difficult questions have offended, angered, made uncomfortable, this president. Rarely have we witnessed such behaviour from a U.S. president, similar outbursts seen only during Nixon’s period of crumbling respectability.

Of course that’s happening in the political arena. What about the religious? Noted Canadian writer Pierre Burton was once asked by the Anglican Church of Canada to write a book on Anglicanism in Canada. They hoped for a glowing, positive account of the denomination’s witness and service in Canada. Instead Burton gave an honest critique of the church, rivalling the passionate language of the prophet Jeremiah.

It was a groundbreaking book, published in 1965, titled, The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at the Church in the New Age ("new age" in this context was not a reference to what has become known as New Age philosophy, music, spirituality). His book was a no-holds-barred analysis of the modern (early 1960s) Anglican Church and by extension all "mainline" denominations. Burton's conclusions were harsh, yet prophetic. He claimed the Church had drifted from its founding principles and was therefore increasingly irrelevant in Canadian society. The Church had become complacent, institutional, comfortable in its easy spirituality and neglected its calling to faith-inspired activism. In a way, Pierre Burton was echoing the words of Luther that the gospel of Christ is by its nature offensive to the Pharisees and Roman Governors of every age (even within the Church), those who are more than comfortable with present arrangements, their own positions of power, their elitism. His book provoked change in the Anglican Church.

Here in Advent as we focus on the miracle of Jesus' arrival among us, God in the flesh, Emmanuel, we may easily forget the kind of ministry the adult Jesus pursued, the "annoying" preaching he offered, the offence he gave and called his followers to give. Yet we have reminders. Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot in El Salvador in 1980 while presiding over Communion because he advocated for the oppressed and challenged the military junta in power. Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged in 1945 in a Nazi concentration camp because he confronted the Nazi regime with the message of God's love for all in Christ. Baptist preacher Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on the balcony of a Memphis Motel in 1968 at the height of the Civil Rights movement because his dream for racial harmony and justice was offensive to the many segregationists opposed to racial equality. In each case the inspiration for such martyrdom was Jesus Christ and the offensive nature of the gospel.

Two weeks now till Christmas. The One who is born at Bethlehem is also the One who still preaches a radical reorienting of society according to God's ways, not humankind's ways. What might it mean for us to forgive without limit, love enemies, welcome the outcast, serve the poor, and live compassion?

Grace and Peace,
Rev. Dave