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## Advent: Memory and Hope

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away;  
see, everything has become new!*

[2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

Advent 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

I drive by Tree of Life Synagogue nearly every day. Police barriers surround it on two sides. It appears very still. The funerals are over, and the first periods of mourning are concluded. Regular services have moved to Rodef Shalom “until our building is repaired.”



Families and friends wake up each day and move through their lives as best they can. But how does one repair the soul torn apart, the mind that cannot let go of what has been done?

In Jerusalem, the Western Wall of the Temple stands as a monument to loss. It is all that is left from the destruction wrought by Roman legions in 70 A.D. That catastrophe forced a wrenching realignment of Jewish self-understanding. No longer was God housed on Mount Zion, perfect in its beauty. Now God was to be found wherever Jews gathered to read and hear the Torah, a house of God made of human hearts.

But this house of God is fragile, as we have learned. It was torn apart during the Holocaust, not only in Germany, but also places where Jews thought themselves safe: Poland, Lithuania, Italy, France, and the enclaves throughout central and eastern Europe. And in our time, most recently in the uniquely Jewish neighborhood of Squirrel Hill.

We are all a part of what has been torn; the dead and wounded are our friends, our neighbors. And the question is as urgent now as it has always been: in the wake of such things, how can life move forward, not as something stunted and fearful, but life in its fullness, blessed with vigor and joy?

In Advent we find two blessings we need for such a life: the blessing of *memory* and the blessing of *hope*.

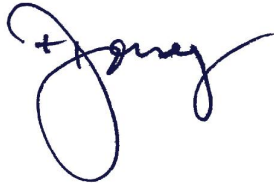
In memory, God — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the same God and Father of Jesus — stirs in us the embers from the fires of His mighty acts. These are written everywhere: in the Law and the Prophets, in the Psalms, through the Gospels and the Letters, culminating in the Revelation to John. The message is clear: we have been brought into being, nurtured, and called by a God who loves us, who gave Himself for us, and who calls us to love one another as He has loved us. Each of us has a

testimony pointing to this God, some person who spoke to us, gave to us, taught or protected us, at the right moment, in the nick of time, whose word changed our life. No matter what befalls us, nothing can take that away. It happened. And it will happen again.

That is our hope. It is anchored in the knowledge that God is always true to Himself, that God is always visiting His people, always loving us, always sustaining us, always present, perhaps especially in our sufferings. Hope looks to the culmination of this love, as the Collect says, when *all things will be brought to their perfection by the One through whom all things were made, even Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior*. Hope knows that this perfection is, in fact, already visible, in acts of love, mercy and justice, in broken things being raised up, in old things being made new.

So, we look behind, and see the Christ Child given once for all, a gift no horror can take away. And we look ahead, and see the coming of the Messiah in power, perfecting all that is. In the meantime, we give thanks; we comfort those who mourn, we bind up the broken-hearted, we rejoice in every joy as each appears. We love, teach and heal, as God has loved, taught and healed us. And we look for the Day when all that is mortal shall be clothed in Life.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.  
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh

