

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ 28 November 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Advent is here! It is almost unbelievable that time is moving so quickly as we begin this new Church year. Our readings today give us a sense of the themes that will be threaded through this blessed season: a cry from the heart, a promise, a word of assurance, and a blessing.

Psalm 25 holds the poignant cry for help, “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me” (Ps 25:4-5). There is a lovely reflection by Sister Sallie Latkovich csj which reminds us that God is waiting for us to trust enough to cry out.



This Advent, I have come to see that it is God who waits for us
waits for us to notice that we are indeed created by God.
God only sees our goodness and waits for us to notice, too,
waits for us to notice the myriad ways in which God is with
us,

waits for us to notice when we observe people acting in the image of God:
in covenant with one another, both those known and unknown,
both those alike and those very different,
waits for us to notice the emptiness in our hearts that can only be filled by God's own Self.
In the season of Advent, as Christmas approaches, God waits for us
to notice the wonder and innocence of little children.
It is true that in Advent we wait; but really, it is God who waits for us.
May we savour and revel in that reality.

The promise is found in the first reading of Jeremiah as God says, “In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David who will execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:15). This promise is from the very heart of God and causes the prophet to give God a new name, “The Lord is our righteousness.” For us in this modern time, “righteousness”



had not been a word which we understood in the way the people did in the Old Testament. It had become associated with self-righteousness which was condescending and superior. However, we now understand it in the new way of “right relationships” – right relationships with our God, with each other, with all creation, and with ourselves. To see God’s name as “Righteousness” in that new sense is to understand the wonder of inclusion, rooted in the sacred communion of all creation. Right relationships ensure that everyone – human and other-than-human – has unique dignity and has a place at the table of Mercy.

Our Cosmic Advent Wreath reflects this gift of our newly awakened awareness of the sacred communion of all creation. The Cosmic Advent Wreath is rooted in “deep

Living Cosmic Advent Wreath
Reque, Peru, 2020

incarnation” – week one: Birth of the Universe; week two: Birth of the solar system; week three: Birth of Jesus the Christ; and week four: My Birth into the Whole Cosmic Body of the Universe). The fifth moment is centered on “All is One,” that moment which Pope Francis speaks about as the “joy of our hope.” On this first Sunday of Advent, we rejoice in the love of God outpoured in the creation of the cosmos, the universe, Earth, and all Earth creatures.

The word of assurance comes from the Gospel of Luke which seems a little strange in the Advent readings we usually associate with gentleness and peace. Jesus speaks to the disciples about “signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves” (Lk 21:25). He tells them that “People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lk 21:26). It is not a hard stretch to imagine these things happening in our world today from the persistent COVID pandemic with the omicron variant to the terrible floods of last week in British Columbia and western Newfoundland to earthquakes in Peru and Chile yesterday to the cyberattack on the health information systems in Newfoundland and Labrador two weeks ago.



An attentive heart
open to the cosmos

But what is even more important are Jesus’ words of comfort and assurance that, if we are alert and awake to these realities around us, we will find redemption. In Sister Veronica Lawson’s words, “An attentive heart and constant prayer for the strength to withstand whatever comes is the proper stance for the Christian believer. An attentive heart will be attuned to the cry of Earth and the cry of those rendered poor by those who exploit the goods of Earth.”

And, finally, the blessing comes from the first letter to the Thessalonians, which we believe to be the oldest text in the whole New Testament, “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you” (1 Thess 3:12). This is a promise of love which, when we read carefully, we see

echoing the sacred communion of all creation held in the loving embrace of God, “love for one another and for all.” This blessing which is built on our trusting in and listening to the Word of God brings all our readings together. It is a response to our cry for help, the living evidence of God’s promise to us of right relationships, and the assurance that comes from listening to God’s Word in the midst of the challenges and disturbances we see around us.

We end our reflections this morning with a slightly long Advent credo written by Allan Boesak, a member of the South African Dutch Reformed Church and anti-apartheid activist:

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss.

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction.

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever.

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon

his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world.

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers.

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young ones shall see visions and your old ones shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history.

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ – the life of the world.

Happy first Sunday of Advent!



REFLECTIONS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ 05 December 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

We enter the second week of Advent, this beginning of our liturgical year. The word “advent” means “coming.” In a sacred way, this time reminds us that creation has come, Jesus the Christ



has come, each one of us exists. And yet, celebrating Advent every year also reminds us that God is still creating, our universe and our Earth are still unfolding. Every time a new blade of grass grows up, a kitten is born, a new baby cries, and a new star emerges, we see God’s co-creating work among us. Jesus who once walked on this Earth is still with us, suffering with us in our pain and rejoicing with us in our hope. And each one of us is not yet complete – each day we grow more and more into the person whom God created us to be, called us to be, nourishes us to become.

Our second lighted candle in our cosmic Advent Wreath echoes this same sense. This week we light the green candle and reflect on the birth and the birthing of the solar system and our planet Earth. Brian Swimme reminds us, “Birth of the solar system – this vast ocean of our solar system is like a womb, that has unfolded over some five billion years to become galaxies and star, palm and pelicans, the music of Bach and each of us alive today.”

Our readings today reflect what has happened, what is happening, and what is yet to happen. The first two readings – from the book of Baruch and Psalm 126 – speak about the people of Judah coming back after the terrible time of their exile in Babylon. We note that the exile lasted forty years. The life expectancy of the people of that time was less than forty years. Therefore, almost every person who returned from exile was born in the foreign land, not in Judah. They learned from their parents and elders about their homeland and their God who promised them that they would return.

Baruch is one of these books of the Old Testament which is considered canonical by Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics but is considered a holy book by other Christian faiths. Baruch, the word means “Blessed One” in Hebrew, was the scribe for or secretary of Jeremiah (we meet him several times in the book of Jeremiah). His words today are filled with hope for the people: “Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. . . see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. . . God will bring them back to you. . . The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God’s command. For God will lead Israel with joy, with the mercy and



righteousness that come from God.” Can you imagine how these words resounded in the hearts of the people as they waited for their return home!

Psalms 126 is well known to us. Now the words of Baruch have been proved true. “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’” God has remembered the people. They are coming home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves – a wonderful image of the harvest of hope.

This image of the harvest is echoed in the reading from Paul’s letter to the Philippians, “You may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness.” Paul tells them and us, “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. . . this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight.”



John the Baptist Preaching in the Desert
Jesus MAFA

In the Gospel from Luke, we encounter one of the great Advent people, John the Baptist, whom we first meet when he is born. Every morning we pray his father Zachariah’s prayer (the *Benedictus*), “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare God’s ways, to give knowledge of salvation to this people by the forgiveness of their sins.” (Luke 1:76-77). There is a wonderful irony in the listing of all the important people who are leaders of the most powerful lands of their known world. The one who is sent to herald

the coming of the Incarnate one is not one of them but John, the son of Zechariah, who lives in the wilderness.

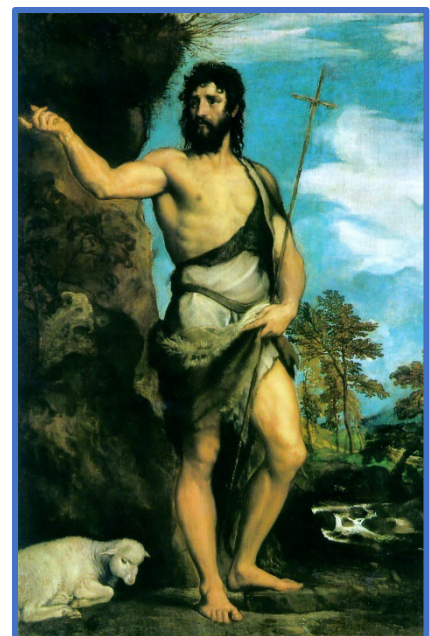
The wilderness or desert for many is a threatening place, a destabilizing place, a place on the edges, but also a place of possibility, a place away from everything that structures and dominates. Delores S. Williams, the womanist theologian, in her book *Sister in the Wilderness*, speaks of the wilderness as a place of resistance, survival, and transformational encounter with Jesus, a place away.

This prayer reflection by [John Birch](#) speaks of this simple man, whose voice coming from the wilderness, helps change the face of the Earth

In the lonely places, the wilderness
Where we stand forlorn windswept and alone
Your voice calls out, Prepare a way for the Lord

In the dark places, the shadows
Where we hide our fears and embrace our tears
Your voice calls out, Prepare a way for the Lord

*By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,*



*to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1:78-79*

As the rising sun comes to us each dawn
Shine upon those who live in darkness
That all might know the joy of our salvation
The forgiveness of sins and your great mercy

For the desert places in which we walk
The streets we roam, the paths we cross
Guide our feet, take us to places where you would go
Give us words that you would use
That in this Advent season of promise and preparation
We might point the way with John the Baptist
To the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!



Reflections for the Third Sunday of Advent ~ 12 December 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

This third Sunday of Advent has traditionally been called “Gaudete Sunday” – “gaudete” is the Latin word meaning “rejoice.” Today, the third candle to be lighted on the Advent Wreath is the pink candle to reflect this special designation. The priest celebrating Mass will wear rose-coloured vestments rather than purple.



Today's readings in the Liturgy of the Word are filled with reasons for rejoicing. The greatest wonder is that, in the first reading, it is God who is rejoicing! Even more astounding, God is rejoicing in us! "The Lord God will rejoice over you with gladness, will renew you in love; will exult over you with loud singing" (Zeph 3:17). Can we even imagine that God would sing with joy, dance with delight, because of us! And yet, that is exactly what this word from the prophet Zephaniah is saying. Ask yourself, "What is so good, so wonderful, about me that God rejoices

in me?" Ask the same question about your family, your circle of friends, your place on Earth. Trust that this is so. And imagine God singing and dancing in that goodness.

The Jesuit John Foley says this beautifully, "God's gladness sings out joyfully at every instant, and God's song is the earth, the galaxies, the people and plants and chemicals and soaring hawks and encircling planets, droplets of dew and heavy black holes, youthful beauties, ancient wisdoms, and everything else that exists. In other words, we are God's song."

All four readings then give us reason for our rejoicing – God loves us so much that God chooses to dwell with us. In the time of the Israelites and in the time of Jesus, people believed that there were many gods. They believed that their god who chose them loved them. But for the Israelites and later Jews and Christians not only does the God who chose us love us but, even more, our God chooses to dwell among us. In the short reading from Zephaniah, we read not once but twice, "The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst" (Zeph 3:15, 17). In today's psalm which does not come from the book of Psalms but is taken from the prophet Isaiah, we sing, "Great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel" (Is 12:6). In the letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us, "The Lord is near" (Phil 4:5). John the Baptist



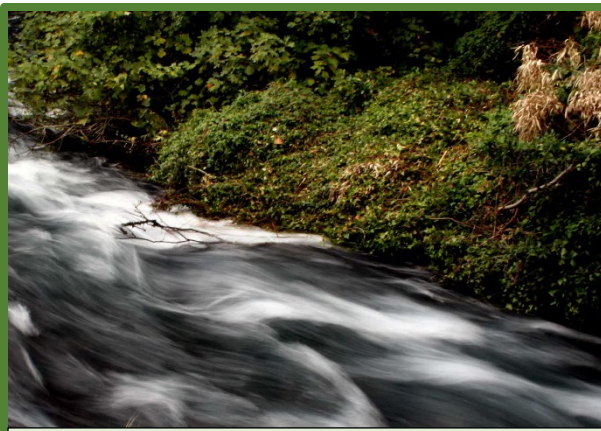
reminds his disciples and us, “One who is more powerful than I is coming” (Lk 3:16).

This sense of God dwelling among us is the name given to Jesus, *Emmanuel* – God with us . Within the Jewish tradition, one of the names of God is *Shekinah*, meaning “dwelling” (the dwelling of the divine Presence among us). This week of the Cosmic Advent Wreath, we celebrate the incarnation of Jesus the Christ. Teilhard de Chardin reminds us, “Christ and Jesus are not exactly the same. In Jesus, God’s presence became more obvious and believable in the world. By his incarnation (the Christ) inserted himself not just into our humanity, but into the universe which supports humanity. The presence of the incarnate word . . . shines at the heart of all things.” God is present in the heart of all things – humanity, Earth, the universe, the cosmos. For this reason, we rejoice.



The poet and spiritual leader, Edwina Gateley, echoes this indwelling of God in her little poem:

God is soaked in our world.
God's Spirit lives and breathes in and through all that is.
We are lost only when we do not understand
that God is already with and in each one of us.
Our task is recognition of God's initiative to be at home in us—
acceptance of God-With-Us.
Then we cannot but be glad.



Spring at Tel Dan, one of sources of the Jordan River, where Elizabeth spent the summer of 1979 at an archaeological dig.

A second reason for our rejoicing is that our God, who created, knows our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and still loves us and forgives us when we turn away from our own goodness. In Zephaniah, the prophet tells us, “Rejoice and exult with all your heart. . . the Lord has taken away the judgments against you.” The psalm from Isaiah brings us one of the most beautiful phrases from the whole of Scripture, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Is 12:3). Paul writes, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil

4:6). Thomas Merton describes Advent in this way, “The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ.”

In Luke’s Gospel, John anticipates the coming of Jesus with a powerful expression of diversity and inclusion. As John proclaimed the good news to the people, they ask the question, “What should we do?” (Lk 3:10). John sees each one for who they are, knows what each one professes to do and who they profess to be. Then he responds differently to each one in their uniqueness. God and Jesus will answer each one of us in the same way when we ask the question, “What should I do? What should we do?” We are created in our uniqueness, and we respond out of our uniqueness. Even more, God rejoices in our uniqueness. How can we not rejoice in our own uniqueness? May this Advent be a moment in which you rejoice in the gift that you are – a gift that causes God to sing and dance with joy!

Thus, Gaudete Sunday is a reminder to us, no matter what our pain or uncertainty or sense of frailty or sense of inadequacy, God never ceases to love us. Meister Eckhart writes, “Whatever our way of life may be, we must not cease to progress; this has been true for everyone, however far he or she may have advanced. Above all else, know this: Be prepared at all times for the gifts of God and be ready always for new ones. For God is a thousand times more ready to give than we are to receive.” Let these words echo in your heart this day.



For Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley, this Gaudete Sunday brings even greater reasons to rejoice. In one of those rare moments of synchronicity, this Sunday falls on December 12, the anniversary of the founding day of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy. on 12 December 1831, Sister Catherine McAuley, Anna Maria Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley made their profession in Dublin, Ireland, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy was born. For 190 years, this blessed charism of God’s mercy has been handed down from Sister to Sister to all the Sisters living today. The Sisters have shared their love for Mercy with so many from their own families to those among whom they minister to those who share their journey in Mercy to Earth who has held them in her embrace. They have received Mercy in its fullness from across forty-four countries in which they have lived and ministered. They are rediscovering Mercy in new and life-giving ways every single day. For those Sisters of Mercy (in Canada and in Peru) who received the charism through the hands and heart of Frances Creedon, they promised this year one

more way of living God’s gift: ***Mercy ~ Imaging the Face of God in all Creation . . . Misericordiando: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación.***

The third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Foundation Day – this is a day for all of us to rejoice in the gifts that God gives us each and every day. “What should we do?” Perhaps these words from [Thom Shuman](#) give us one more answer to our question:

If you come so
those thirsting for hope
 will find it gushing out of the taps,
those cursed by the world
 will be embraced in your arms of love,
that the despair which overwhelms so many
 will be gathered with the chaff and used to warm the homeless,
those who have lived on the scraps we toss into the trash
 will be at the head table of your feast,
 and every one, every last one of us will find our way home;
well then, I will wait,
 and while waiting, I will rejoice,
 and while rejoicing, I will make this great news known.

May each one of us find the way, through our own unique gifts and circumstances, to make this great news known. May each one of us find the way today and every day to truly find joy, find delight, find hope in our world.

Happy Sunday! Happy Foundation Day!



REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ 19 DECEMBER 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today, our Advent Wreath candles are fully lit, guiding us into these days leading directly to Christmas. The Gospel reading gives us two living guides, the two women who lead us across the boundaries of time and space into this new moment in history. The short Gospel passage is a familiar story, giving us the comfort of the known, and a thrillingly new story, calling us into the unknown.



Mary has just made her commitment in the presence of the angel Gabriel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). This pregnant, unmarried teenager has not only learned that she will become pregnant but that her elderly cousin Elizabeth is also pregnant. Elizabeth, on becoming pregnant, had gone into seclusion saying, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (Lk 1:25). These two women know society's way of seeing them as disgraced – Elizabeth because she has been barren for so long, and Mary because she is pregnant but not married. Mary first instinct is to run to Elizabeth – perhaps for both their sakes – to help Elizabeth and to find safety for herself. Mary and Elizabeth – the young and the old, the unmarried and the married, the socially established and the socially vulnerable – share the beauty and the gift of community, loving and supporting and nourishing one another. As Henri Nouwen describes this moment, "God's most radical intervention into history was listened to and received in community."

What unfolds in their encounter is beyond understanding! Two prophets meet ("filled with the Holy Spirit"); together, they announce the coming of the new time. Elizabeth blesses Mary twice – first, that Mary is pregnant ("the mother of my Lord") and second, that Mary has believed the promise made by God and agreed to be part of its unfolding. While the English translation uses the same word "blessed," in Greek the two words are different (*eulogemene/os* and *makaria*), showing the sense of two differing kinds of blessing. Elizabeth's words echo the blessings of Moses from the book of Deuteronomy as the people prepare to enter the Promised Land, "May you be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. Blessed is the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock" (Deut 28: 2-4). This ancient blessing recognizes the interconnection of all God's creation.





The next verses from Luke will have Mary's words, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for God has looked with favour on the lowliness of this servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:46-48). Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes Mary's *Magnificat* this way: "It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings. . . This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is

instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind."

The first reading from Micah echoes this sense of the God who looks to the powerless and the forgotten, the least important ones, to herald the good news, "You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Mic 5:2). And this one who is to come has unusual qualities for a ruler and warrior, "shall stand and feed the flock in the strength of the Lord. . . shall be great to the ends of the earth; shall be the one of peace" (Mic 5:3-5). This one shall feed the flock, shall be great to the ends of Earth, shall be the one of peace. While we readily understand the feeding of the flock and the bringing of peace, only in recent years have we seen as well the reaching out to all Earth's creatures, human and other-than-human.

What does all of this mean for us? Meister Eckhart gives us the simple yet profound answer, "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us."

This Christmas, like all Christmases, comes to remind us once again that we are invited into the fulfillment of God's promise as Elizabeth and Mary were. Our response will never be at one point in time. Instead, we renew our commitment to the promise, individually and in family or in community, over and over again. This past summer, the Sisters of Mercy renewed their promise as a congregation to "Mercying: Imaging the Face of God in all Creation ~ Misericordiendo: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación." How will we renew our promise at this Christmas time? How will we "give birth to Jesus in our time and in our culture"? In what ways will we be "mothers of God" in this coming year? How will the Son of Man be begotten in us?

God does not invite us into the promise and then let us find the way on our own. In today's Psalm 80, the psalmist cries out three times, "Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Ps 80:3, 9, 17). An old, married, socially established, and disgraced woman together with a young, unmarried, socially vulnerable, and disgraced woman teach us by their presence to trust that the God who makes the promise keeps the promise. "God's mercy is from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50). All we have to do is say "Yes."

In a beautiful prayer-poem, the spiritual writer [Jan Richardson](#), speaks to how Mary was received by Elizabeth and how we are to be received when we say our “Yes”:

You hardly knew how hungry you were to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome that invited you to enter entirely –
nothing of you found foreign or strange,
nothing of your life that you were asked to leave behind
or to carry in silence or in shame.
Tentative steps became settling in,
leaning into the blessing that enfolded you,
taking your place in the circle
that stunned you with its unimagined grace.
You began to breathe again, to move without fear,
to speak with abandon the words you carried
in your bones, that echoed in your being.
You learned to sing.
But the deal with this blessing is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger in safety, in stasis.
The time will come when this blessing will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary that you have found –
to speak your word into the world,
to tell what you have heard with your own ears,
seen with your own eyes, known in your own heart:
that you are beloved, precious child of God, beautiful to behold,
and you are welcome and more than welcome here.

Let us delight in taking our place in the circle that stuns us with its unimagined grace. Let us become the sanctuary for others that we have found for ourselves.

Happy Fourth Sunday of Advent!