

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ 27 November 2022
The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Stillness, waiting, peace-making – these are the colourful threads creating the beautiful tapestry of our readings in today’s Liturgy of the Word for the first Sunday of Advent. Our four readings invite us to be still, to wait and listen, to be makers and receivers of peace.

Brother David Steindl-Rast osb, in a poetic reflection, gives us the sparkling colour of stillness:

May you grow still enough to hear
the small noises Earth makes in preparing for the long sleep of winter,
so that you yourself may grow calm and grounded deep within.
May you grow still enough to hear
the trickling of water seeping into the ground,
so that your soul may be softened and healed, guided in its flow.
May you grow still enough to hear
the splintering of starlight in the winter sky and the roar at earth's fiery core.
May you grow still enough to hear the stir of a single snowflake in the air
so that your inner silence may turn into hushed expectation.



The writer of the book of Isaiah invites us to come apart from our everyday world, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord that God may teach us God’s ways and that we may walk in God’s paths” (Is 2:3). The psalmist responds, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Ps 122:1). In his letter to the Romans, Paul invites us to wake from sleep, to put on the armour of light, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:11, 12, 14). And Jesus in Matthew tells us, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matt 24:42).

Stillness is certainly not an easy state to find in our world. Globally, we are being reminded of the terrors of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the droughts in Africa, the dire warning of our climate emergency, the loss of so many species of life every single day, the threats to democracy all around us. Nationally, we are worried about the triple threat of COVID/RSV/Influenza placing children and older people at high risk, rising inflation and cost of living, the burden on our health systems. In our own province, we lament the fact that there are so many more people who need

good housing, good food and stronger social supports. Stillness seems elusive at best, impossible to find at worst!

The pastor Sharron R. Blezard gives us comfort that we can find this stillness, “As Christians, we expect to find Jesus in the unexpected places, in the company of unlikely people, at any time of the night or day. We expect the unexpected. We try to ready ourselves for the possibility of divine disruptions as the Spirit moves people and situations into our line of vision and into our all-too-carefully-constructed lives and overbooked schedules. It’s writ large throughout this week’s lessons from Isaiah, Romans, and Matthew. Advent bids us to stop, to breathe, to consider the marvels of creation, of each other, and of the Divine presence that infuses every molecule of the cosmos.”

Waiting and listening are the response made possible within the stillness. Veronica Lawson rsm says it so well, “Advent invites us to look forward rather than back and to dream gospel-inspired dreams that will enable creative change in our own lives and in the life of our planet. It invites us to be awake, to be ready for any eventuality. Dreams and visions have always been the precursors to effective and life-effecting change. We need the grace to see visions and to dream dreams that make for justice and peace and that permit us to walk more freely in the light of God’s ways.” It is worth noting, in the opening verse from Isaiah, that Isaiah “saw” the word of God. How do you see the word of God when you enter the stillness and wait? What are the dreams and visions that flow into your heart and spirit when you wait for the Spirit which God promises will be poured out upon us no matter how young or old we are (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18)?

The stillness and the waiting flow into a response that leads to peace – again continuing Brother David’s words:

Peace. . . the angel announced.
But peace is as much task as gift.
Only if we become calm as earth, fluid as water, and blazing as fire
will we be able to rise to the task of peacemaking,
and the air will stir with the rush of wings of angels arriving to help us.

This is why I wish you that great inner stillness
which alone allows us to speak, even today,
without irony of "peace on earth" and, without despair, to work for it.



Psalm 122 calls us to the task of peace-making: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.’ For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, ‘Peace be within you’ “(Ps 122:6-8). Having invited us to come apart so that God may teach us God’s ways, Isaiah ends his words with confidence that we have learned what God has been teaching us, “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” (Is 2:5). Jesus confirms, “You also must be

ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Matt 24:44). Pope Francis pleads with us, “Please do not watch life go by from the balcony! Mingle where the challenges are calling you to help carry life and development forward, in the struggle over human dignity, in the fight against poverty, in the battle for values and in the many battles we encounter each day.”



One of the symbols of this stillness, waiting, and peace-making of Advent is our newly discovered Cosmic Advent Wreath. For this first Sunday of Advent, we celebrate the first incarnation, the birth of the cosmos, described so beautifully by Richard Rohr, “God’s first ‘idea’ was to become manifest - to pour out divine, infinite love into finite visible forms. The ‘First Flaring Forth’ (Big Bang) is now our scientific name for that first idea; and ‘Christ’ is our theological name. Both are about love and beauty exploding outward in all directions.”. Meister Eckhart reminds us, “God creates the entire universe fully and totally in the present now. . . God

creates the whole cosmos in the innermost depths of every soul now.” Each morning this week, let us say this heartfelt prayer:

Come, Sacred Source of All Life. Today, as we light the candle of the birth of the universe unfolding in God who fills it, we pray for an awareness of the oneness of the universe, vast and vibrating with the sound of its beginning. Like the First Flaring Forth, this small flame reminds us of our presence in the Christ in whom we live and move and have our being in this ever-expanding universe. Come, waken us to Oneness.

We conclude our reflections today with this poem-prayer from the Scottish Presbyterian minister, Roddy Hamilton:

it is ancient as old as the first word
for it is the first word ever spoken by a God
who was feeling the divine voice
for the first time

its sound has taken many forms through
the ages, but it speaks
still, the single truth it always has

some hear it beating swords into ploughshares
others hear it hammering spears into pruning hooks
and still others hear the original word
that shaped these others
the first word:
the word, love

May your Advent be coloured by stillness, waiting, and peace-making as you hear in your very being again and again the first word ever spoken by our creating God – love!