

Jeff's Jottings
December 18, 2020

This Year...

The Advent readings this year have been consistent in their direction, pointing us not simply to the child in the manger, but to the kind of world God intends to bring into being through this child: a world of God's ways, made known and real through Immanuel, God with us. God's kingdom, as our denomination's stated clerk, J. Herbert Nelson, is teaching us to say, and to live.

But this year, more than perhaps any year in our lifetime, the tone is sounded in a different environment. In a world beset by COVID; in a world deeply divided racially and politically and economically, and distanced socially, trying to balance our desire for emotional connection with the fear of spreading a potentially deadly virus to our loved ones—maybe it's just me, but hearing the clarion call of the prophets over the same computer I use to write emails and shop for groceries somehow sounds different. Like a blanket of fog shrouding a season of hope.

And yet, every time these last few weeks that I found myself sucked toward this muck hole of bad news, I've been saved, on that same computer. Saved again and again by the words and deeds of good-news-of-great-joy people willing to speak up...step up...act up, as signs of hope in these despairing times. Housing the homeless. Defending the attacked, giving voice to the marginalized. Loving the enemy. Working for change. Navigating with courage and creativity this odd time we're in. People in this presbytery, and well beyond this presbytery, acting out of a truth they know by heart: that the light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

This year, perhaps more than any before it, I resonate with the words of Madeleine L'Engle:

God did not wait till the world was ready, till...nations were at peace.

God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release.

God did not wait for the perfect time.

God came when the need was deep and great. God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.

God did not wait till hearts were pure.

In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt. To a world like ours, of anguished shame, God came and God's Light would not go out.

God came to a world which did not mesh; to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

In the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the maker of the stars was born.

*We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,
or to share our grief, to touch our pain,*

God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

("First Coming" by Madeleine L'Engle)

God came when the need was deep and great. The angels that surround us—the better angels of our nature: they, we, speak the message of truth in this difficult and challenging year, a message that cannot wait, when we echo the angels outside of Bethlehem: “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. For unto us is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

To all of you in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, for your consistent and courageous words and witness; to all of you in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, who not simply believe but speak and live a gospel of good news which shall be to all people, all people; to all of you, thank you. Thank you.

May the peace of Christ be with you in this Christmas season.