

December 15, 2019
Third Sunday of Advent
Still : Joy

Ancient Reading ~ *Isaiah 35:1-10 The Joyful Return*

Let the wilderness and the dry land be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of YHWH, the splendor of our God. Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees. Say to all those of faint heart, “Take courage, fear not! Look, YHWH is coming, vindication is coming, the recompense of God- God is coming to save you!”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unsealed. Then those who cannot walk will leap like deer, and the tongues of those who cannot speak will sing for joy. Waters will break forth in the wilderness, and there will be streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. The haunt of jackals shall become thickets of reeds and papyrus. And through it all will run a highway, a road called the Sacred Path. Evil people won’t travel by it; it shall be for God’s people - and no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any fierce beast roam about it; but the redeemed will walk there--for those whom YHWH has ransomed will return. They will enter Zion singing, shouting for joy, with everlasting joy in their faces, welcomed home with gifts of joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Second Reading

~ *Homecoming, adapted from Rachel Held Evans in “Searching For Sunday”*

When I write off all evangelicals as hateful and ignorant, I am numbing myself with cynicism. When I jeer at their foibles, I am numbing myself with cynicism. When I roll my eyes and fold my arms and say, “Well, I know God can’t be present over *there*,” I am numbing myself with cynicism. And I am missing out. I am missing out on a God who surprises us by showing up where we don’t think God belongs. I am missing out on a God whose grace I need just as

desperately, just as innately as the woman who dropped her sponsorship of a child in a protest against gay marriage. Cynicism may help us create simpler storylines with good guys and bad guys, but it doesn't make us any better at telling the truth, which is that most of us are a frightening mix of good and evil, sinner and saint.

The annoying thing about being human is that to be fully engaged with the world, we must be vulnerable. And the annoying thing about being vulnerable is that sometimes it means we get hurt. And when your family includes the universal church, you're going to get hurt. Probably more than once. If we want to heal from our wounds, including those we receive from the church, we have to kick the cynicism habit first. We have to allow ourselves to feel the pain and the joy of being in relationship with other human beings. In the end, it's the only way to really live.

The church is God saying: "I'm throwing a banquet, and all these mismatched, messed-up people are invited. Here, have some food and drink."