

God's messengers, prophets and angels have been reminding us to align our purposes with the Divine purposes of God's reign. God's incarnation (God's being and existence joined to created matter) in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth has its greatest impact when we remember that Jesus gives us a clarion call to live and love as he lived: fully aligned to God's purposes in God's kingdom.

Our world needs our renewed commitment to God's reign that is ever embracing the entire creation, indeed every family, language and tribe of nations. The world can be dark, but God's light as it has been revealed over and over again, and especially in the Word Made Flesh, Jesus, pierces the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Our nation seems so divided, but we are all one from the foundations of God's good creation.

Although prudence and wisdom are important virtues, God's reign means we will not allow fear to rule our lives. Many of the conversations going on in the culture around today are more governed by fear than the love we know in Christ Jesus. The question for all of us is, "How does our hoping for, preparing for, and expectations for God's reign change our voice in these conversations going on?" Are we more concerned about the right Christmas presents than the Christmas presence of God coming into the world? How does our care for others through our time, talent and financial resources, reflect God's reign in our lives?

God's presence in Christ builds a human community of love and blessing across differences of tribe, race, religion, gender, economic status, sexual identity and all the issues we face in our diverse and beautiful world. We proclaim a God who is God of all, who has been at work in this world from the beginning of creation and who has been specifically revealed in the Word made Flesh, Jesus. And our God continues to bring people together in Christ's love and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our Advent preparations may we engage others with this way of living together in our nation and world, setting our fears aside, revealing our hope in God's call. Welcoming God's reign, we offer a view of the world that locates all humanity in the embrace of a loving and caring God...a God who is revealed in Jesus the babe of Bethlehem whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, and whose presence wants to be born again in our own lives and world.

So let us hope for and prepare for the real work of Christmas. I share words from Howard Thurman, spiritual leader, preacher and civil rights advocate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that I shared in last year's Christmas homily as you reflect upon your preparations over the next week:

*when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.*

With blessings and love to all in these final days of Advent and in our preparing and expecting for the peace, love and joy of God's reign in Christ we celebrate at Christmas!

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