

O Come, O Come Emmanuel . . . PLEASE!

By Brad Leger –
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I'll be honest. I know that the Advent season is supposed to be a time of hope and anticipation of celebrating Jesus' birth and building peace in the world; but I really haven't been feeling it lately. I mean, come on. Every time I turn around, there are more and more negative news reports on the LGBTQ+ front: cruel, insensitive, misinformed pronouncements and policies made by church leadership in our country concerning LGBTQ+ school and church employees and LGBTQ+ faithful in general (including the denial of sacraments). It seems to be accelerating.

Some prelates from other parts of the world continue to support the passage of laws which criminalize the actions of LGBTQ+ persons who are trying to live their lives authentically. There is an ever-rising wave of anti-transgender legislation being considered and signed into law by a number of state legislatures across our country, especially targeting trans youth. There is a record number of cases of violence against and murder of transgender persons in our country, especially transgender women of color. (To make matters even more discouraging and perplexing, there is the deafening silence by most clergy and leadership around these issues of violence and exclusivity.) Add to this, there are the continued contentious issues associated with the COVID pandemic, the persistent presence of racism in our country, toxic partisanship in our politics, the cruel treatment of immigrants around the world, the heightened tensions between the U.S. and China and Russia – and you get the perfect storm for disillusionment, sadness, hopelessness, and frustration.

All of this is so antithetical to the gospel message of love and inclusivity that I have come to know in my own life. Therefore, amidst this deep sense of discouragement, heartbreak, and hopelessness, what am I – someone who is doing his best to follow the Good News of Jesus, someone who is among so many who are working so hard for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons within church and society – to do? What must I tell my weary, anxious heart?

Thankfully, some great words of wisdom have recently been brought to my attention in the form of a quote from the great Hebrew Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann. It has thrown some sparks of encouragement and deepened perspective of the notion of hope into my exhausted, tattered soul. He writes:

"Hope in gospel faith is not just a vague feeling that things will work out, for it is evident that things will not just work out. Rather, hope is the conviction, against a great deal of data, that God is tenacious and persistent in overcoming the deathliness of the world, that God intends joy and peace. Christians find compelling evidence, in the story of Jesus, that Jesus, with great persistence and great vulnerability, everywhere he went, turned the enmity of society toward a new possibility, turned the sadness of the world toward joy, introduced a new regime where the dead are raised, the lost are found, and the displaced are brought home again." [1]

These words have thus reminded me that this Holy Mystery which we call God/Love in Action is indeed “tenacious and persistent in overcoming the deathliness of the world,” and that God “intends joy and peace.” I must also continue in my efforts to emulate Jesus in his “great persistence” along with his “great vulnerability” (gulp!) to turn all of these great challenges toward new possibilities of living and loving in this world; in other words, transforming death into life. One of the things which gives me hope is the knowledge that seeds of love are always being planted across the world by so many loving people, including my colleagues who are part of the MSJC.

As a member of the Marianist Family, I think that it would be appropriate to end this reflection with this prayer written by Laura Jean Truman:

An Advent Prayer to our Sister Mary

God of our sister Mary—

I’m not always sure when to burst out in song against injustice,
and when to ponder in my heart.

Give me the courage to preach when I’d rather hide, and wisdom to listen when I’d rather scold.

Walk with us this Advent, fierce and gentle sister Mary.

Amen

May the upcoming celebration of Jesus’ birth remind us that the Holy Mystery is always with us and appears to us again and again through life’s struggles as well as joys. Have a blessed Advent Season of hope. O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

[1] Walter Brueggemann, *A Gospel of Hope*, compiled by Richard Floyd (Westminster John Knox Press: 2018), 104–105.