

ADVENT REFLECTION FOR 2ND SUNDAY, 2017

Of all the clothing in my closet, my most favorite, comfortable, cozy thing to wear is a heavy red sweater that belonged to my Dad. He really liked that sweater; he looked great in it and wore it a lot. After he died I claimed it as my own – because I liked it, too, and well, I just thought he would want me to have it. When I wear this sweater, I feel embraced in warmth. When I wear it, I can almost feel my Dad’s strong arms wrapping me in his love.

That’s how I felt when I read the readings for this 2nd Sunday of Advent. These readings abound with rich, tender imagery. At every turn they reach out to us and bless us with the promises of God’s love:

“Give comfort to my people,” Isaiah says.

“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem ...

like a shepherd he gathers the lambs in his arms, carrying them close to his heart, and leading the ewes with care.”

The responsorial psalm tells us that

“God proclaims peace to his people” ...

and poetically tells us

*“Kindness and truth shall meet;
justice and peace shall kiss.”*

Peter tells us in his second letter that

*“The Lord is patient with us,
not wishing that any should perish.”*

In the Gospel, John the Baptizer is telling us to stay tuned, because one who is greater than he is coming with a **different kind of power** and a **promising way of being** that will change the world. The language in all these readings is encouraging and hope-filled ... reminders of the covenant relationship God wants with us.

One of the things that struck me in the first reading ... words I had heard for years but never thought much about or noticed in the same way as they impress me now ... are the words:

*“Every valley shall be filled in,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together.”*

Previously when I heard these words, they registered in my mind simply as nice thoughts. This year I was repeatedly drawn back to them and tried to visualize what that would actually look like and what it would mean for us.

These words speak to me now of a leveling, a balancing-out, an equality that is so much needed in our country and world at this time. Not a sameness, but a fairness - which generates understanding and respect for all people. Not an interchangeableness, but a recognition of **richness of diversity**, and an equity which would provide for all people opportunities for a good quality of life - with basic needs like nourishing food, clean water, affordable housing, fair wages, balanced education, fair treatment, freedom from fear and hatred - from violence and abuse, a chance for children to grow healthily to adulthood believing that any of their personal dreams are possible.

These words speak to me now of a sharing of wealth among peoples, a reaching out to those who need to be lifted out of poverty, joblessness, bullying, hunger, medical needs they can't afford. These words speak to me now of forbearance, acceptance, forgiveness, reverence and harmony between races, nationalities, ethnicities and religions. This is the kind of world I now visualize when the Advent readings speak of justice and righteousness and Isaiah speaks of filling in valleys and leveling hills.

The readings for this Sunday also talk of Heralds, Messengers, people who prepare the way. Messengers are usually not the main characters in any story, but back-ground players whose purpose is to point to someone or something else. Messengers are usually not speaking for themselves but simply carrying the message of others; they are not always accepted if the receivers do not like the message, but do their job because the message is more important than they who deliver it.

All of us have had messengers in our lives, people who paved the way for us to have a better life. Messengers try to preserve the good by making sacrifices so that those who follow them can live well. I'm thinking of our Founding Sisters who struggled in an unknown land, living hard lives so that our community could continue for generations after them.

I'm thinking of our Community leaders, who undoubtedly had sleepless nights thinking about how best to guide the community, relying on deep inner strength and trust in God's wisdom to make hard decisions, and serving with the vision and energy to bring new ideas and get everyone on board.

I'm thinking of our grandparents and parents who always wanted better things for their children and their children's children than they had in their own years of living.

To all of them we owe a debt of gratitude for their forethought, sacrifices and caring.

And today we hear of John the Baptizer, a simple man, close to the earth, clothed in camel's hair, feeding on locusts and wild honey, who knew that his primary importance was to prepare the way for the one who was to be our salvation.

Where would we be without any of these?
How are we messengers for others?

There **are** messengers living among us – faith-filled women living simply, who lead us to God by their example of trust and faithfulness, by their living day-in-and-day-out serving without complaining, by their smiles, gratitude, generosity and reverence. There are messengers who stretch us, who increase our awareness of the needs of others. There are messengers among us who call us to be our best when we think we have nothing to give. All of them lead us closer to the One for whom we wait in these Advent days.

Finally, the readings for this Sunday **challenge** us to be ready for the coming of the Messiah, to prepare ourselves to receive all the good God wants for us.

“What sort of persons ought you to be,” Peter asks in the second reading, *“conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for the promised new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells?”*

Today’s society is desperately in need of people who can show us *“a different way of being that will change the world.”* The reality of the vision I pictured in Isaiah’s words will most likely not happen in our lifetimes, but in our own corner of the world, by living as people of expectation, people of peace, witnessing to others that we believe Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” is already in our midst, we can help to prepare the way to bring it closer to reality for those who live after us.

What would it really look like if the valleys were filled in and the hills brought low, so everyone could live peacefully on a balanced plain?

What if: justice, righteousness, noble integrity, reverence, respect and peacefulness **were the norm?**

What if: all people could live without fear - freely and securely - with stability and well-being?

What if: atmospheres of understanding, compassion and healing would enable **all** people to feel *“embraced in warmth, wrapped in the love of God?”*

Come to us, Lord Jesus, show us the way.

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