

A Weary World

Romans 8:22-24 (NRSV)

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; **23** and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

John 1:14 (NRSV)

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

[Augsburg College Chapel, Advent 1, November 30, 2015]

Grace and peace to you from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – and blessings to you in this Advent season when love once again breaks into human history to enliven and empower us to live as God's faithful people in the world! Amen.

As we enter this Advent season and prepare for our annual Advent Vespers worship services this week, the haunting hymn we have just sung and the theme of this year's vespers – “Light dawns on a weary world” – rings especially true. For surely we all long for the light to break forth in the midst of our darkness, to offer us respite and peace and hope in the midst of a weary world marked by violence and fear and hate. How long, O God, must we wait; how long must we live in the darkness; how long must we despair of your reign breaking in?

How long, indeed?

We grieve over a weary world, a world that groans in labor pains – pains that each of us feels deeply and personally. A weary world where terrorists kill innocent people in Paris and Beirut and Mali and Nigeria; where insurgents on all sides garner fear and hatred; where our sacred earth is threatened by our own selfish and foolish behaviors; where communities around our country are torn apart by violence that disproportionately targets people of color; where, even in our own campus community, our fellow travelers experience bias and misunderstanding. How long must we wait for love and justice and mercy and compassion and hope to break into our groaning creation, our weary world?

Surely our gracious God hears our prayers. And yet, one of the temptations of Advent is our often impatient, even passive, waiting for the light to dawn. We grieve and we lament – surely important acts in themselves – and we wait for the light we know has come and will come again, but is that where it ends, is that all there is to do?

As we turn into this liturgical season, let us be reminded of this college's founding scripture and perhaps the most apt way to sum up what Advent marks for God's faithful people: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelled among us.” Consider this. God

broke into human history. God came into the darkness. God chose to dwell in the weary world, alongside of us, and in so doing offers us all a path forward, an inspiration to move beyond waiting, the stuff of which hope is forged. And that is what we embrace this Advent.

When we are tempted to sit back and wait, we give up on the mystery and work that is all around us - a mystery we are called to embrace, work we are called to do. In one of this year's Advent Vespers readings, the poet Wendell Berry invites us to know the dark, for God is in the dark as well, blooming and singing of the promised redemption.

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.

To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,

and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,

and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

—Wendell Berry, "To Know the Dark" from *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*, 1999.

As theologian Barbara Brown Taylor has written: "...here is the testimony of faith: darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day." So how shall we go without sight this Advent, how will we join with our awesome God, who walks alongside us on the way to Bethlehem and Jerusalem and Emmaus, to Paris and Beirut and Minneapolis and St. Louis - holy cities all?

Surely we must begin by proclaiming that "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" is both a theological and a practical claim upon us. It is a proclamation that God so loved us that God came into the world, was made incarnate (as we claim in our Christian creeds), chose to live in the darkness, in a weary world, in a groaning creation. That is the theology of the gospel writer, but given John's soaring philosophical, ethereal tendencies, we often forget that the theology demands faithful action; the theology calls us to do God's work, to work alongside God in healing the world, to be the Word made flesh in our own lives of faith in the darkness, in the weary world. That is the practical claim.

And so we commit once again this Advent season, not to be tempted to wait for the light that is to come but to bear witness to the light already come – the Word made flesh – that calls us to action, to go without sight and travel in the darkness, to be of good courage and faith on the path that Jesus first trod for us, to know that God's spirit is here in our midst, never leaving us comfortless or without a horizon of hope.

And into the darkness we go – as God's faithful people – to:

- Stand with our neighbors, near and far, in our common aspirations for healthy communities, fair and just lives together, compassion for the vulnerable, a home for those experiencing homelessness, the beloved community in which dignity and respect for each other inspires our common purpose; to...
- Stand for abundance, when the world says there is never enough; to be beacons of hope in a world where there is too little evidence to hope; to feed hungry bodies and minds and spirits with the plentiful gifts of our good God; and to...
- Stand up and get to work, believing that the Word made flesh calls us to be the body of Christ on earth, in the darkness, in the weary world; to live as 16th century mystic Teresa of Avila charges us in this haunting poem:

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
 Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
 Christ has no body now but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

My friends in Christ, stand with someone, stand for something, stand up – for light dawns, love grows, and hope blooms when and where we live as God’s faithful people. May you know God’s grace and truth on your Advent journeys in the weary world until all the world in wonder echoes *Shalom*. Amen.