



The Work of God's Hands

Reflections for Advent & Christmas 2017

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Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2017

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11, 2 Peter 3:8-14, Mark 1:1-8

"Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God." Isaiah 40:1

God doesn't want us to be in pain, yet pain is inevitable in life. So then, what is the value of pain? Rumi, a Persian poet and Sufi mystic, taught that pain is a great teacher and great healer if we allow it to be. But does that mean we need to chase pain to find healing? Society seems to say so when hard work is extremely valued and "harder, better, faster, stronger" has become a mantra. The Catholic Church seems to say so when suffering is upheld as a virtue. However, life brings enough mountains to climb on its own volition without us having to search for burdens to bear.

God wants to give us comfort so let yourself be comforted. God wants to forgive our faults, expiate our guilt, and make the "rugged land plain." How are you blocking this comfort in your life by clinging to the belief that pain, in itself, is valuable? We can always forgive ourselves and return to God's embrace instead. This does not mean we will have pain-free lives by any means, but it means that we can look at our pain differently. We don't have to search for pain, and we don't have to avoid it. We can embrace pain only inasmuch as it teaches lessons and encourages us to heal. We also can lean on God and fully believe in a God that wants to restore the world to comfort.

*Where in your life are you believing that pain is the proper path?
What do you think the difference is between seeking out painful
experiences and allowing painful experiences to be life lessons?*

Christmas Day

December 25, 2017

Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

"There was no room for them." Luke 2:7

Jesus knew exclusion from the beginning. The innkeeper's refusal begins a journey that ends with Jesus on the Cross, abandoned by nearly all who claimed to love him. It is no different today when so many doors are closed to Christ. There is simply no room for refugees or families experiencing homelessness, nor are spaces accessible if someone has a disability, lacks health insurance, or whose gender identity does not fit into "neat," binary categories. Exclusion, driven by fear, is a powerful enemy that even afflicts Jesus, the Son of God.

Throughout Advent, we prepared to receive this child for whom the world has no room by making room in our lives. Today and through the Christmas season, we rightly celebrate. How stunning that God would come to dwell with us! What a beautiful mystery the Incarnation is! When this season concludes, however, the world will still have no room for Christ. Wars will endure, and the victims they create will face bombed-out hospitals and closed borders. Prejudice will keep communities of color and queer folk away from the centers of power.

Jesus' birth reminds us that discipleship is a movement to the peripheries in growing solidarity with those people who are forced to them. Jesus' birth also reminds us that the peripheries are blessed. When Christ comes again, the center will be hollowed. Worldly power expelled, God will be centered and draw the peripheries inward towards Herself. The world makes little room for Christ, but there are infinite reasons to celebrate confidently, for God is now with us and all are welcome!

How is the Christ Child urging me to practice radical hospitality in my life?

This reflection booklet is available for pre-order via paxchristiusa.3dcartstores.com or call Rachel at 202 635 5819 only through September 21, 2017.