

“On That Night”

*“On That Night...And Tonight...What Is
God Thinking?”*

*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24*

July 15, 2018

Rerun of December 17, 2017

Advent is a time when we step once again into the darkness which is the unknown....or knowing.

We do so seeking a life of peace, joy, love, and hope...
hope being that place where joy meets the struggle.

A time within when we remind ourselves
that opting out is not a way for a grown-up to live,
a maturing Christian to be! (On Being)

...for we are growing up in the stories of our faith again this year offering us renewal and the ability to resist!

But really...Joy in meeting the struggle?
Really?

This is our sense of joy:
the offering of a new perspective on the struggle,

a new ability not to set expectations too tightly...

not even to set lower expectations for that means we have already defined what is possible...

Rather joy comes to those in darkness as we in trust step into the mystery of what is yet to come...as of now not knowable,

like those long ago on that night, that first night so long ago and tomorrow!

Joy is found in the mystery of letting go of our usual ways
of thinking, the smallness of past pettiness or pet peeves

and responding in a renewed way
to the big things that surround us.

To resist through engagement!
That's how joy meets the struggle.

Advent is a time to come even closer to an inner newness which we could not have conceived of on our own...

a coming of Christmas within!

A cosmic change is coming!

...often marked by surprise, resistance,
then a rush of energy!

Hear the angel saying: “Do not be afraid!”

~~~

And don't you have to wonder...what were they thinking  
on that night so long ago:

What are you thinking...coming here this morning?  
What is God thinking...today...as we gather as worshipping community?  
Of course, we know God is not a person and not even a being... more a mystery, a  
presence, a life giving energy  
that seeks for love and truth to meet so  
peace and justice kiss! *Still...*

Is God thinking: be...be glad you are here...right here? Please....  
don't rush ahead...to Christmas?  
Don't rush! Be in Advent! Be Advent!?

God knows: Advent isn't passive....

It is about living a transforming life while we are waiting eagerly, expectantly...waiting  
to be  
transformed even further!

Live what you already know to be Christmas inside  
while awaiting more Christmas!

Be the gift, while giving yourself "the" gift...again!

It's simple.  
*We do know what God is thinking!*  
God's vision of waiting...is living in the present, expecting...more!

It's right there in that Isaiah passage...

what all people  
returning from exile (to the land of our souls...Advent!) are called to be and do  
**as** they experience rebuilding the ruins of life!

The simple words of today's scripture capture our call and reflect the power and  
confidence God

has in us to do important works....

and the images used assure us, while God calls us,  
God holds us close.

Remember last week's comfort, God's strong arm holding you?

Again I say this week...

*Without the comfort of being held close and surrounding myself with others  
aware of their own ruin  
and supporting me in my rebuilding project,*

*I cannot find my power to maintain even one new and important thing...  
let alone*

*all God sets before me as possible  
and calls me to “do-be”.*

*You ask: What are we to do? It’s right there!*

*...to release, to proclaim, to provide, to comfort  
...to be other able, comfort able, do able!*

Whether those I’m called to release....well....

whether “those” I’m called to release are imprisoned unjustly behind bars in Waupun  
or imprisoned  
around the table in my house,

whether those oppressed live in Yemen or in the abusive family next door,

whether the broken hearts are within those who live in the Ukraine or in India or Iraq  
or Afghanistan ...  
or is my own broken heart!

**And, I know I cannot begin to answer any one of these calls unless I  
absolutely feel “wrapped” in the One Who Loves Me....  
able to see myself and situations more clearly.**

I cannot comfort those who mourn till I see what is in deep grief in me....ruined in me,  
in ruins in me, oh my!

Can’t provide, if I’m not in touch with my own need and know the difference between  
having needs and being needy.

Can’t proclaim unless I hear God’s voice for myself.  
And start walking that talk!

Can’t bring release to anyone until I release myself from the way things seem and the  
ways **I keep** making them seem that way...cause I’m afraid of...my power!

Until I am renewed and resist my usual way of thinking about my world!

Seeing myself more clearly, wrapped within God's arms...and yours...  
frees me....I'm released from...  
my own limiting thoughts and self-doubts!

I can stop taking things personally that aren't personal!

I can stop projecting onto others my perceptions which are based on my feelings  
because I've never even spoken to them directly about there's.

Seeing myself more clearly, with your help and God's,  
I can see this life of mine strewn with possibility.  
I can hear angels singing songs of freedom...from fears!

*But really?*

God thinks I can do all these things named in Isaiah....how?

How do I get to that place of grace and courage,  
to live with a spirit of love and power and self-discipline  
and see myself as able?

What on earth is God thinking...that I can do so much?

*You're gonna need a lot more angels, Lord!*

Isaiah's words are full of mercy!  
Not just things to do-be!  
The images are full of mercy.  
Listen:

~The Spirit is upon me...not in me....but upon me.  
A gift, not another thing to figure out and do. Feel it!?  
Being spiritual is not work to do...  
but a freeing, a way to be.

Letting that higher angel already within...out!  
Living my faith! Getting out of my way!  
*Mercy...*

~I am given a garland, instead of ashes....God is focusing on the good...as Paul says.  
God sees what is good in me and doesn't focus on  
what coulda, mighta, oughta been! Old news!

The Holy doesn't focus on how I've made an ash out of myself,  
Or fixate on the ashes of life.  
But rather on that...ahh...unwrapped gift in those ashes!

Why? Why do we, do I keep doing that...seeing what's wrong with me?

I could note what's in ruin and then look below their surface to see: *that while the walls might have come a tumbling down, the foundation still stands!*

Building from the ruins means standing on that foundation you've been building, maybe built long ago, and laying one new brick at a time!

*Mercy!*

Isaiah goes on to say I am given...

~An oil of gladness instead of mourning. God coats me with oil to hold the gladness in and keep it from evaporating....don't let joy escape you!

Keep the energy, spiritual energy, in and don't let it dissipate!

Encourage my self/your self to focus on what works in life vs. giving all my energy to what doesn't.

*Mercy.*

~When we stay grounded, rooted in faithfulness, we are as oaks of justice showing God's glory in us....we can claim our power because we are very powerful.

~The devastations of all the generations are before us, yep what your mom and dad did and didn't do to you and for you....are before you...

AND

all that they ruined can be raised up and life built anew by YOU...**if you choose to do it.**

The past isn't binding us. Isn't defining us.

We can stop maligning...us!

*Mercy.*

~You are clothed in a garment of salvation...you have what it takes to save you from yourself. Put on a new you!

~You are covered with a robe of justice....when acting in the name of justice, God's providence offers an ultimate protection

from what is unjust around you,  
protection as you go out into the world....3 feet at a time!

~God bedecks you for life, new life,  
like a bridegroom and bride bedeck themselves to begin a new life.

~Justice and praise grow daily...just as a seed  
in a garden shoots up and grows...and shows what is true.

**It's a process.**

Which means....what you see is not all that you get.  
Thank God!

**What you seem to be...is not all of who you are.**

**You CAN love more than you have been loved!  
You CAN love more than you have been loved!**

You are holy just the way you are and God makes you able...  
has already gifted you everything you need  
to live a life of well-come.

(You come well and you bring wellness to others.)

**Even if your cup seems only half full...  
in that half  
is everything you need.**

Body, spirit, and soul come together.  
You are one, whole.  
Stay whole.

Isaiah and Paul's wisdom: Life is GIFT to be lived!  
And, God is faithful.

**This is what God is thinking:**

God indeed knows the thing, the gift you most need which is the very same gift  
the universe needs!  
And so gave you...**YOU!**

So...

What are you thinking?

Imagine Mary and Joseph thinking so long ago...having to claim their central gifts of  
faith and trust in order that

Jesus be born in us!

Can you name one of your central gifts?

Paul gives some clues about how to live “life as gift”:

~Pray without ceasing....ask God to hold the prayer unbroken, see life through prayerful eyes.

(sorrow means...arguing means...hurting means...)

~Rejoice always and be thankful in all things.....see the half full cup instead of the half empty...everything on the way to heaven is heaven...trust....some good will come....

~Don't malign the local prophets among us or within you...for there is always a bit of truth in their words,  
and yet don't swallow what “they” say whole,  
think for yourself... test it out.

~Hold fast to what is good....what are you holding on to?

~And see the temptations all around you to do evil....in countless little ways.

**You are other able, comfort able, do able.  
Because you are gift enabled!  
You are Christmas!**

Advent preparation is about slowly seeing anew,  
setting aside the old ways and perspectives  
like Mary and Joseph did that night!

Will you give yourself a chance to see yourself in a new life?

The Advent of something new....and it begins again  
as “on that night” so long ago!

Turn away from the world's expectations,  
your own expectations.  
Appreciate what you bring to each situation.

Like those in the story long ago who knew not where they would go or what would be  
or how much time it might take: stay the course.

Stay in process, in relationship! Stay awake!

Loosen up your control...

**embrace the cosmic change that so wants to come  
to your life and our world!**

On Christmas Eve, *on that night*, for just those moments,

it's as if time stands still. It always does that night.

It's probably why so many people come at least this one night.

In the lost-ness of that moment, something is found.

On that night, it's as if you become the candle of the Lord shining through the darkness...a way becoming clearer.

Sing to yourself this season a new song: I'm dreaming of **a Cosmic Christmas!**