

Advent 2A, December 5, 2010

Lections: Isaiah 11:1-10; Ps. 72:1-7, 18,19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

She looked very tired as she scanned my groceries late one afternoon this past week, not her usual cheerful self. Cautiously, because this is Canada and I don't really know her, I said, "you seem pretty tired today." She didn't speak for a moment and then it came tumbling out, the tired which was close to despair. "It's Christmas and I don't have enough money. The young people stealing just so they can buy stuff and I can't buy for everyone now. I am going to do something for my grandchildren but that is all. It's all about the children anyway, isn't it?" She was on my Advent road this week, holding onto the hope that she could do something but not everything.

"Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you." (from the passage in Romans).

This Advent season compels us to ask what we are preparing for, what we will look at or reject on this road to Bethlehem. Who are our companions? Can we hear what they are saying? Is anyone listening to us?

She is faithful, coming to every service in the nursing home, singing all the hymns and mouthing the words of the service along with me. One day she is weeping over the death of her husband; another morning I find her crying over her own failures in life. This week she wore a lovely red sweater and had been to the hairdresser – she had curls. She wore a small angel pin. "I have something for you," she said before we began the service, smiling at me. I returned her smile but thought nothing about her statement until it was time for her to return to her room. "Take off this pin," she said. "I want you to have it." Oh no, really....I resisted. She insisted. The humility of receiving means letting go, giving up any power I might have. She's one of the people on my Advent road. My discomfort is so strong I speak with the staff and then think I will pass on the pin to the grocery store clerk. Or maybe I won't do that; I will ponder the kindness and generosity of this beauty in the wilderness, and let myself be open to the road of faith in her that reaches out to me.

"Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you."

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a peaceable kingdom in marked contrast with reality, where opposites are in harmony in God's kingdom. Perhaps poverty sits side by side with generosity; perhaps grasping must lie down with giving. Assyria was a nation that would never grow or flourish; instead, a stump, a remnant would produce a savior.

John the Baptist tells us that the Advent road is not of our own making and to be on that road means letting go, of sin, of self, of the past. "Wilderness is where we go but not where we want to stay. And deprivation itself is not the goal, even if the desert has its own sweetness," says Jan Richardson. I guess there is honey in isolation. But we are in a holy community where God intends to make a road through each of us. Our own lives are a path of welcome for the Holy One who intends that the path unfold before us and within us. What are the acts of preparation that allow us to really see what is happening around us? Sometimes the messengers are sent even when we don't ask for them.

"Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you."

I'm tired of the weekly trips to the doctor that have marked my last six weeks- anxious about the test results, frustrated that something had gotten under my skin. Not a cancer and not an infection but still a problem. Yet another physician enters the room, asks lots of questions while my anxiety builds and builds. It's all about the spot on my leg, the outer mark on the skin I'm in. His questions and my answers stop. But I am not sure I am in the room; I know my leg is. "My grandmother lived to be a hundred years, two months and seventeen days," I say. He turns and asks me why I am telling him this. "Because I am worried that my life is not going to be the same, that I will have to change what I am doing, that this pain in my leg is serious." Finally, my whole self is on the Advent road, the voice that needs hope, needs time to prepare for Christmas, needs reassurance. Is there an open path between us?

"Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you."

God is on our Advent roads, our pilgrim paths, making the journey. We're on the road with others, looking for stars, for generosity, for hope. Advent is the now time, not the past nor the future; Advent is the present where God makes a path and continues to come. Amen+

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