

What then should we do?

This weekend we light a pink candle (Sunday is Gaudete Sunday) meaning Rejoice Sunday. Zephaniah, some would say he's a doom and gloom prophet, tells the people to sing aloud, rejoice, exult. Cantic 9, a song of Isaiah, speaks of drawing from the wells of salvation, shouting aloud, singing for joy. Paul, though perhaps imprisoned at the time of this writing, entreats the people of Philippi to rejoice in the Lord always—in fact, he says it twice! He also mentions that one ought to remember by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, speak with God of their deepest requests and desires.

What are you thinking? Are rejoicing and singing and exulting the primary elements occupying your mind this day? Or for that matter, much of a reality in the day-to-day goes on in your life in these present days, that often times seem to be dark days on many fronts; personally, politically, communally, globally? What then should we do?

Perhaps there are some nuggets of wisdom contained in the readings and if explored, they can help us find our way through the darkness. As we sojourn through Advent, the season that celebrates light in the midst of darkness, it may not be so easy to see encounters of light. Yes, there is the artificial glow, and sometimes blindingly extravagant lightshow, that is all around us, but are you and I aware of our very essence, that perhaps pulses with some anxiety as we wait for the longer, brighter, sunnier days of natural light and brightness, now past in our hemisphere, but that we know and anticipate the return of, in the months ahead?

How might you and I draw upon the Spirit to learn from this time? What might she teach us? How can we, do we survive this time of darkness and cold? Dare we go deeper into ourselves to make discoveries during the slow rhythms of winter?

Though there's something to be said for independence, not the kind that society touts, might we consider, too, that there are others with whom we can gather? Those with whom we can share, who are "slimmer" among us and need our warmth? Those who may have resources upon which we can build and gather, helping us to keep warm? Is it possible there are hopes and dreams and holy imaginings that you and are carrying through the darkness as we await new birth in Spring? Are there ways each of us might be wells of salvation for others to draw from? Or being humble enough, to dip into the wells ourselves when we are in need?

In a similar way to the people Zephaniah is speaking too, you and I may be experiencing assaults by many factors in our surroundings today. We may feel that our hopes are dashed. Maybe it feels odd to think of joy and rejoicing-singing. For me, it helps to remember that I'm not simply anticipating the anniversary of the birth of Jesus; rather I celebrate God already here in the midst of life and the promise that I am never and never will be alone and forsaken.

Paul points to the need to trust. He admonishes us to let our gentleness be known to everyone. Peace and restoration don't just fall Henny-Penny-like from Heaven. Each of us is gifted so that we might be a part of fashioning the Kingdom that God so earnestly desires for ALL Creation.

The crowd surrounding John asks him, what then shall we do? Because of John's brusque manner and loud voice, one might expect him to say, drop everything and follow me to the desert to live a life of fasting and penance. Instead, however, John calls the people to fidelity in the current circumstance of the life they are living. Those who have more than enough need to share with those who have less; tax collectors need to be honest in what they take; soldiers aren't to take advantage of the vulnerable. We, as beloved children of God have the same opportunity to examine our lives, repent of those things that don't measure up to loving our neighbor as ourself, to be brave despite our fears, be visionary as were John and Jesus, to nurture holy imaginings and allow them to become beacons helping to lead the blind to sight.

What then shall we (I) do? This Advent I'm trying to be faithful to this pledge from the Ignatian Community-and with hope, allow it to be a "rejoice" that I carry on:

I pledge to discover how much is enough for me to be truly fulfilled and to consume only that.

I pledge to be part of the discovering of how much would be enough for everyone-not only to survive but to thrive-and to find ways to bring about equity to make sure that every life can flourish while sustaining earth.

Through this commitment to restraint and justice, I am striving to live the teaching of Jesus, healing my life, and in doing so, I am part of the healing of the world.

What then shall we do? There is a line from one of my favorite songs by Trans-Siberian Orchestra in their recording, The Christmas Attic, that says, Strike one match in the dark and all the world's not the same. Perhaps you and I might each strike one match and together, light the way, rejoicing, exulting, and singing as we help transform this world through compassionate, righteous, merciful living.

Amen