Peace Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021
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As I was discerning whether or not to share the teaching this Sunday, something about it being the Peace Sunday in Advent was pulling me, so I wanted to say yes.

I suppose part of the draw is that while peace is something I feel intimately familiar with, it’s also felt more elusive lately. Perhaps largely because I’m in my own season of advent within my body during this pregnancy. Similar to the liturgical season, it's a time of preparation, of hope, peace, joy and love, right now and yet to come.

I think like most times of in-between, of coming, of advent, I feel tension. I feel the tension of the change to come, even when it’s incredibly welcome.

The nausea, exhaustion, and hormonal changes that accompany the pregnancy have affected me not only physically but emotionally, spiritually. I feel exhausted from needing to ask for help, which is quite uncomfortable as someone who prefers to be independent and self-sufficient, not to mention someone who really enjoys providing for my family and loved ones. I have days where I can see this time as an abundant invitation to receive the gifts God has for me, a time of incredibly unique learning. I have other days where I just wish I could have the energy to make breakfast and not fall asleep as I’m reading to Santiago. It also in a strange way feels like a time of grieving not having the energy I desire to soak up the alone time with Santiago before this other little human comes into the world. In the midst of all of that I also am acutely aware of the immense blessing of this new life, aware of the gift that the nausea and accompanying hormones are signs of a healthy baby, aware of the truly remarkable support I receive from Alfonso and Luisely.

And so I’m called, though sometimes widely uncomfortable, while feeling outwardly passive, to trust the deeper activity and growth stirring beneath the surface.

All this to say that peace certainly feels like a “now and not yet.” And I suppose we are all in our form of advent, aren’t we? Whether liturgically or, within our individual journeys: recovering from surgery, accepting realities of aging, in between jobs, somewhere between now and new life to come.

78 By the tender mercy of our God,

    the dawn from on high will break upon[b] us,

79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

    to guide our feet into the way of peace.

These words from the canticle of Zechariah feel deeply familiar to me because they are said at the end of morning prayer by people all over the world in the Catholic tradition of Liturgy of the Hours, which was something I used to pray during college and at other times in my life. Zechariah is the father of John the Baptist from whom — because of his unbelief that John has been conceived in his and Elizabeth’s old age — the angel Gabriel takes away his voice, and once John is born, these are the first words that Zechariah speaks. In the gospel reading for today, we hear John the Baptist crying out to prepare the way of the Lord. I wonder in what ways we must prepare the way of the Lord within our own hearts to allow God to guide our feet into the way of peace.

I have often had folks refer to me as “peacemaker” within team or family settings. I’m a nine on the Enneagram (also known as the “peacemaker”). Alfonso when we were speaking about this Sunday said, “Peace is kinda your thing?” Yet, the word peace has taken on a different meaning for me over the years.

My idea of peace as I look back on it was like an image of “not rocking the boat.” If I could adjust myself to support the folks around me to feel steady on that boat, then wonderful. The flip side being that if I felt I wasn’t in right relationship with someone or someone was upset, I felt like the ground was no longer beneath my feet. As we all know, this “steady boat” doesn’t exist. Life is rocky, there are storms, and arguments, unexpected change, new life and death.

And over and over again in those times of the boat rocking so hard I’m tipped over the edge, I’ve found a new unexpected, truer and deeper peace to be found deep in the unknown of the bigger waters.

Without fail, God is there. Emmanuel. God is with us, in that vast ocean.

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 It brings to mind the phrase “dark night of the soul” which is sometimes misunderstood to mean a rough time in life or a time of lack of faith, but actually means dark as in when you can most clearly see the light, those sometimes scary and sometimes deeply peaceful moments floating in the middle of the ocean when you most thirst for God in a way that nothing else can satisfy.

While this is usually attributed to saints and “those holy people over there,” I imagine most of us here have felt this. Even in tiny daily moments. Moments where peace almost surprises us, where God seems to arrive like a small dawn. Perhaps you’re on a run or walk and suddenly feel deeply connected to the creation around you. Or washing dishes and are overcome by a sense of gratitude. Or after a few days of feeling shrouded in doubt and desolation, realize you’re unexpectedly smiling at watching a child or animal.

Something that has helped me to tap back into that peace found in the deep waters rather than relying on the steady boat has been taking time in silence in the mornings. I often come into the time nauseous and exhausted, and all I can do is simply breathe in and out. I notice that my shoulders slowly move from near my ears down my back. Sometimes only touching that peace in that space in between the inhale and exhale. All of us have practices or -- perhaps in Church of the Saviour language -- “disciplines” to help us tap into those deeper wells.

And so I’d like to invite us all to take a moment to sink into that deep place together.

We are going to start by singing a song together. Now it’s a song that I’ve sung before so it might be familiar to you. The words are very simple and it’s sung in rounds. I will sing as well as play the recording so if you’re not ready to join in the first round, feel free to join in when you’re ready. You are also welcome to hum if you feel more comfortable.

The words are:

Loosen, loosen baby

You don’t have to carry

The weight of the world in your muscles and bones

Let go let go let go

 Let’s take a moment to breathe together. Notice your inhales and exhales. Notice where your shoulders are.

I invite you to call to mind a time where you felt that peace, it could be a small or significant moment. Any moment you felt peace within you.

Where were you? What did it smell like? What were the sounds? Can you feel it in your body? What does it feel like?

Now stay there for a moment. Breathe into that moment. Where is God? Where are you?

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