

CHRISTMAS EVE REFLECTIONS 10 PM
December 24, 2018
Rev. Lisa Ward

INVOCATION

Good evening fine travelers into the night of Christmas Eve
We gather this evening for the gift of life, the wisdom of peace and the
courage to heal and transform as is known in Jesus' ministry.

These potentials of gratitude, wisdom and courage are born again and
again with each new child, and known again and again in every hope-filled
life.

Let us hold each other this hour in that promise, in that potential, in that
peace.

SING O COME O COME EMMANUEL

REFLECTION: LUMINOUS DARKNESS

Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding guide us to thy Perfect Light

A familiar refrain to a song dedicated to three wise folk who traveled afar
to bring themselves and their gifts to a babe in a manger who they sensed
could help transform the world. They brought their whole selves to this
knowing, through the dark night.

Since the beginning of recorded history, we have sought signs in the
cosmos for hope and guidance. The luminescence of a star captures our

imagination as we sense somehow, in a quiver of thought, that there is a connection between that star and the spark of life within us. Somehow we are of the same substance. Somehow, all being is of the same substance.

“Out of the stars in their flight,” writes Rev. Robert Weston, “out of the dust of eternity, here we have come; stardust and sunlight, mingling through time and through space.”

Of course the transformation of a dreary world into one alive with possibility would be heralded by a Star in the heavens.

Of course the promise of peace whose message is encoded in every cell of our bodies would be summoned by the wonder of new life, courageously claimed despite harsh conditions and isolation.

Of course this star, energizing a luminous darkness, would be prominent in the legend of the birth of Jesus, a mythic midwifing of transformative hope.

The light of the nearest star to the Earth other than the sun takes 4.2 years to reach the earth. Most of what we see on a starry night is light that was projected tens to hundreds of years ago, and it passes through us on its natural journey, giving us a shared moment of luster, a shared resonance with the life energy of the Universe.

A companionship with God. The Kingdom of God is within you, comes the teaching from this babe in the manger.

Christmas is a time for that transforming message to be brought to life, a calling to embrace the promise of peace within each of us. We make the mistake to think of this as a passive peace – a magical peace where all works out the way we want it and all get along the way we see it.

Peace is a shared ability to navigate the flow of circumstance, without malice toward others or, even, the circumstance. It is travelling through the unfamiliar with confidence in harmony – the mutuality of shared being, that is not about getting one's way but opening to wonder.

When Mary beheld her newborn babe, who had been nourished in the luminous darkness of her womb, she pondered over things in her heart. It could be that she knew, with a mother's intuition, that her child was going to bravely live the way we all could live and she knew, in the next beat of her heart, that it would be hard for him to retain his utter beauty and simple wisdom of being in a world so gripped with fear.

Any parent here knows that moment of seeing the utter majesty of a child's potential, intermixed with a sorrow and an anxiety as we ponder the world that she or he will have to navigate.

We miss the opportunity to truly celebrate Jesus' birth when we set him aside as a being unlike our own. For his life demonstrated how we all could be, born from the luminous darkness into the light.

The message of Christmas only works when we take it on ourselves, fully, completely, as equal beings in a dance of diverse living. Let us ponder this in our hearts.

CAROL: THE FIRST NOWELL

REFLECTION THE WONDER OF A STAR

And by the light of that same star, three magi came from country afar; to seek a king was their intent, and to follow the star wherever it went.

In 2005 and for many years later, Brick House Security in New York City began offering churches and synagogues free GPS systems and cameras to protect their December holiday displays. Yes folks, the baby Jesus, and various menorahs – even Santa statues – have been embedded with a global positioning system satellite tracking device. Founder and CEO Todd Morris named it the “GPS Jesus Program”. Scores of places of worship have taken up the offer and been pleased with the extra security over the years.¹ You see people steal crèche statues, and apparently menorahs now and again. The most popular missing item is the baby Jesus.

I’d like to take that concept for a bit of a ride. Think of it: a GPS system on the baby Jesus.....Might have come in handy for the wise men, then again, it could have been disastrous if Herod got a hold of one. And besides, the star that guided the wise folk, is public domain and links us into the cosmos and creates great songs...

But, really, what if we could pinpoint and track the presence of the wisdom of peace on earth. What if we programmed our satellites to signal those

¹ <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2010/12/prweb8015909.htm>

vulnerable, majestic bundles of energy that could inspire peace in the world?

Humanity, as far as history tells, has never been without war – at least not for very long – not for any one life time. So the paradigm shift from war to peace is a call for a new awakening, a state of being not fully known in this world. This is not the first call for the shift, however. In fact the call for peace, for a different way of engaging in conflict and resolving differences is as old as the pattern of war. This makes it even harder to believe in a shift, to enter into new territory, vulnerable and historically alone. It makes it hard to let go of our assumptions of who we are for what we can become. Yet all of humanity sacrifices its progression toward global community, toward conscious mutuality, toward a raised consciousness of our inherent kinship by continuing the logic of war, by feeding the “us” and “them” paradigm, the theology of scarcity and “never enough” and the arrogance of power over others.

“The goal of community”, writes African theologian Sobonfu Some, “is to make sure that each member is heard and is properly giving the gifts he or she has brought to this world. Without this giving, community dies. And without community, individuals are left without a place where they can contribute.”

So, honing in on the peace on earth gps system, where might we be directed?

I doubt it would be in the chambers of national government, when choices to shut down the government pervade but are not shared by those who choose to furlough others. In fact, the gps device might say: “you took a wrong turn, return immediately to your reasoning and find a better path.” I doubt we’d be directed to a rally for any side that demonizes the other and calls for power in “us” and “them” dynamics. In fact it might say: “you are on the wrong road, go to the nearest roundabout and see that we are interconnected.” We certainly wouldn’t be instructed to make sure we’re number one. The Jesus gps program would say. “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth.”

However, the peace on earth gps system would find many more locations than most of us believe, and those locations are within our everyday lives. How about here, where would it locate peace here?

An interchange between a person who braved a vulnerable sharing in conversation and a listener fully present in response. An adult partnering with a young child creating a magnificent piece of art during our craft day. A host of volunteers lovingly facilitating a memorial service and a caring community at hand for continued support. Volunteers for social action projects, giving of themselves, not because they are more fortunate or it’s the right thing to do, but because it brings them joy – a sense of home. Someone braving the truth. Someone deciding to count to ten before lashing back in anger. Someone choosing to heal from addiction. Someone honoring the life of an animal....countless, countless moments and circumstances when we tender our hearts in gestures of love and care, humility and praise. The gps system would be quite active with a much broader bandwidth than we have yet to follow.

“Leap” challenged Episcopalian priest Carter Heyward, “Take an imaginative step into the experience of the power that goes forth from us, each and all of us, when we stand together as sisters and brothers, co-operative and co-creative, moving together toward and into a Promised Land.”²

And of course, the signal that could activate the peace on earth location is in each of us. There have been many peacemakers who have shown us a way to enter the source of wisdom within that knows harmony, unity and peace.

CAROL: O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

REFLECTION: LIGHT WITHIN

The family of intimates and strangers who gathered around the babe in the manger were there to witness the wonder of a being made from stardust – as we all are. That wonder comes from the deep, sacred knowledge of life’s possibilities.

Theologian and poet John O’Donohue once suggested that we see ourselves as sacraments of possibility – holy vessels of the potential of life. It comes from witnessing the miracle of life before us and not averting our eyes from it or deconstructing life’s majesty through cold analysis and cynical resolve. It comes from recognizing that the wisdom we seek for a

²Heyward, Carter. *Our Passion For Justice* p.122

better world is communicated through our willingness to claim life as precious.

This is a different frame than we presently have in this fast-paced, competitive, even at times predatory culture. It is a different image of being, one that will bring us to peace of being, of living, of learning and becoming. Ways of being that are embedded in the peace and wonder narratives of Christmas.

May we be thankful for song, shared voices and the wonder of legend, which keep our hearts burning -- longing for a better world.

May we dedicate ourselves to the divine spark within each of us, demonstrated in brave acts of love and compassion.

May we rejoice in the gifts of life we hold dear: the miracle of birth, the presence of transforming grace, the countless blessings we give and receive in our daily lives.

And may we ignite our inner signal for peace, that deep impulse of our being to affirm life and celebrate its many wondrous forms.

So may it be. Amen