

Today we hear about John the Baptist who has been sent to prison for speaking out against people in power—in particularly Herod. John sits in prison, and still Jesus points to John's prophetic ministry of calling the people to a practice justice and mercy, feeding the hungry and turning toward God in the practice of the commandments-- praising God and honoring and caring for others. John, sitting alone in prison, depending on visitors for care and food, turns to one of his followers and sends them to Jesus to ask if Jesus is the one to come? Although Jesus talks about John's witness, when John asks, "Are you the One" or perhaps, "Jesus, has my witness been worth it—are you bringing God's Kingdom into this terrible political and military situation of Roman occupation?" And Jesus replies, "Look at the signs. The blind see, the sick are healed"... Jesus does not say I am the One...

This third Sunday of Advent we are pushed to wonder why we have conflict and hunger and war. People are persecuted for their faith and even lose their lives. In our own communities and many miles away, children are hungry and orphaned and the One was and is to come does not seem to have "fixed" anything.

For the Sunday that celebrates Joy with a pink candle and points toward the Christmas Light, this does not feel like good news. Why do we need to encounter John in prison instead of imaging and celebrating the coming of a child with lights that entertain and remind us that Light is coming into the world?

For these texts, we are being reminded to look for signs. We are being asked to look for the signs of Christ's Love breaking into the midst of darkness and cruelty. We are being asked to examine our own unkindnesses and turn toward another way of living with the people we love and with strangers we do not know.

In the midst of exile, war, slavery and exploitation, the text of Isaiah this morning suddenly reminds the people of another way—a promise of abundance. We ourselves can feel it if we have walked the dry, dry parched earth that is suddenly changing.

Have you longed for the rain with your whole heart and prayed that we can turn this deluge of catastrophic weather around with work and God's help?

We are glad for the rain!

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing. Isaiah 35:1-4*

Can we wait and work and care for the earth, planning different ways to engage the world around us and the ground we walk on?

*Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another James 5:7-8*

Really, God? Would you have us not complain against what is going on around us?

Perhaps this third Sunday of Advent we are being invited to examine our hearts that are already surrounded with Christmas Light and Christmas hope. Perhaps we are being invited to enter into the sadness of losses and disappointments in our lives. To light a candle of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love is to point to the knowledge of Christ's Love in the world in that already, not yet that is complicated and mysterious. In the silence of hope, prayer, and meditation—where we meet the Holy One just as we are, we can discover for this season how God is speaking to us and the worlds with Love. We are the people who need to point to the signs.

Cynthia Bourgeault asks:

*Must we be whiplashed incessantly between joy and sorrow, expectation and disappointment? Is it not possible to live from a place of greater equilibrium, to find a deeper and steadier current?*

*The good news is that this deeper current does exist and you actually can find it. . . . For me the journey to the source of hope is ultimately a theological journey: up and over the mountain to the sources of hope in the headwaters of the Christian Mystery. This journey to the wellsprings of hope is not something that will change your life in the short range, in the externals. Rather, it is something that will change your innermost way of seeing. From there, inevitably, the externals will rearrange.*

*The journey to the wellsprings of hope is really a journey toward the center, toward the innermost ground of our being where we meet and are met by God.*

*Cynthia Bourgeault, Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God (Cowley Publications: 2001), Daily Meditations Nov. 30, 2018.*

May we too carry the Light.

*Pastor Susan*