

The Innkeepers

November 28, 2021

Maple Grove UMC

Rev. Patricia Wagner

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 (CEB)

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is what he will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.

Psalm 24: 4-5

Make your ways known to me, Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth—teach it to me—because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long.

She was waiting for me by the door on Christmas Eve after the service was over, as have so many over the years. *Pastor, I don't have a place to sleep tonight.* I look dismayed, both for her and for me. I am tired, it's been a long day, a long season, I just want to go home, finish wrapping presents and watch the pope lead Midnight Mass live from St. Peter's Cathedral. But there she is, or he is, on Christmas Eve, reminding me Jesus' family looked for a place for him to be born in that night. And, I remember that I am the innkeeper. There is plenty of room, there's just no one to watch out overnight to ensure that all is well. So, I figure out some other way to take care of her for the night, then lock the warm church I fully expect that Jesus will talk to me about this when I have left this life. But I also think that the spirit of divine love understands what we are all feeling. Besides the darn game yesterday, we are just worn

out from pivoting from not being able to forecast what is possible next month let alone next year from life's events being beyond our control.

Of course, life isn't. Reinhold Niebuhr says that “We get discouraged when we think we are somehow exempt from the vicissitudes of creature lines.” Isn't that a wonderful phrase? It means the troubles that are part of being human. We wish we could just skip over this weird exhausting time, and be somewhere in the future where all this is behind us.

But Rev. Grace Imathiu a Kenyan United Methodist theologian, says: “Don't miss this moment by wishing it was five years ago, by wishing it was your childhood Christmas, by trying to rush it through so that we get to next year or the year before. Don't miss this. This is the once in a lifetime Christmas. If the darkness is so dark, then this is when the light shines the brightest. So don't be so terrified of the dark that you pretend it's not there. Stare right into the face of exhaustion and lack of control. Look those monsters in the eye and say: ‘Let's do Christmas now. Let's figure out this story that God has given us. Afresh and anew and in this moment.’” The prophet Jeremiah speaks to those in exile from the life they had. They are on the edge of despair, and it is exactly there, that uncertainty opens the door to creativity, to imagination to a different future.

And if you think about it, isn't the Christmas story about the way Divine Love enters into the vicissitudes of creatureliness in unimagined places. What good can come out of Nazareth? A manger, really? It can take a minute to get there, I was driving back Thursday night, from visiting with my brother and his family for the first time in 2 years, when I heard the news on the radio about this Omicron Covid variant. My high spirit deflated as I thought about all who would now stay away from church,

again. But after a moment, I decided to look it in the face. Okay, here we are in this unimagined time. What am I not seeing here? How can I, how can we make ourselves available to be God's partners the advent of the new reality. How might we imagine our our worship arts, and our technology, to reach persons who might never leave their homes to come here. Persons with disabling conditions those with life situations who might not cross the threshold but who need a room in this inn?

So, what if we don't gather in great numbers but in small groups more regularly? How might that allow us to build real, intimate, life changing community? And perhaps there are ways that this wonderful space, this Inn of the Lord might become a means to sustain and restore those whom we might not have had room for before. And the hope began to rise again. What if we all take a good deep breath, go ahead, and stare this moment right in the eyes.

This once in a lifetime Advent and Christmas. Let us remember whose inn we keep and be of good cheer a cheer that reflects our very real hope. Then let's share that with our families our community, our guests on the patio. Let us trust that the faithful One who lights the sky with stars. Is lighting our way even and especially this year, Amen.