

Friday night I stood in my living room next to our beautiful Christmas tree,
and said to Lee, “let’s just keep this up all year – or at least all month”
I know I’d be tired of it by July – but every Christmas season one of my
favorite things
is to sit in the living room and look at the beautiful lights on the tree.

I got up yesterday morning and heard the news.
The United States had bombed Venezuela and taken its president.
Trump announced the United States will “run” Venezuela for the near future –
not even pretending it’s about but oil and financial interests.
It felt like a punch to the gut, and left me shaky all day.

After about an hour of consuming news reports about the attack and the president’s
speech
I got up and started to put away Christmas decorations.
The stockings, the dishes, the advent calendar – all felt wrong, somehow.
There is no part of me that feels like celebrating.

But here’s the thing.
In the calendar of the church, it is still Christmas.
Not the holly, jolly Christmas of American culture –
but the Christmas of church and faith and scripture.

The word of God became flesh and came to dwell among us.
Full of grace and truth.
The light of God which still shines in the darkness,
and the darkness does not overcome it.



Our reading today is still in the first chapter of John.
Like an overture in an opera or musical theater,
which introduces the melodic themes,
the first chapter of John introduces themes John will develop in his story of Jesus.
Themes of light and life.
Themes of bearing witness and what it looks like to be disciples.

The first character in John's gospel is John the Baptist,
who tells about the savior who is coming, and will be the lamb of God.
The first identifications of Jesus tell us he is the eternal Word and Wisdom of God,
made flesh – and that he will die, the Passover lamb who delivers us from sin.

One thing that happens a lot in the book of John
is that a dialogue will work on two different levels.
In the story today, two disciples ask Jesus – where are you staying?
He has come from Nazareth to the region of Judea,
where John is baptizing and preaching –
it makes sense that they might want to know where he is staying.
But the verb John uses here is one of John's favorite verbs – *meno*.
To stay, to remain – to abide.
So on a deeper level, the disciples ask Jesus –
where do you dwell, where do you abide.
And we know that, for John, Jesus is the one who abides in God, always.

Jesus invites them, "Come and see?"
The disciples follow Jesus, and they see where he is staying –
the place in Judea where he is sleeping and eating.
And they remain – *meno* – with Jesus.
Over time, they will see and come to know that Jesus abides in God,
and that Jesus invites them also to abide in God,
by staying with and following Jesus.
Already, John is showing us that disciples are the ones who abide in God,
and God in them.

Where are we staying?
I will admit this morning that I am staying in a lot of anxiety.
Anxiety for our nation, our democracy and the wellbeing of people
who rely on government assistance for food security and health care.
Anxiety for my young adult children, and the world they will live in.
Anxiety for the climate.
Anxiety, now, for our soldiers sent to battle on foreign soil for questionable reasons,
and for all whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by warfare we bring.

I am staying in anger.
Anger over the illegal and callous actions of our government.

Anger over our betrayal of immigrants and asylum seekers who have come to our country, followed the laws, done what they were asked,
and are being detained and deported.
Anger over corruption which no longer even hides its face.

I am staying in grief and sadness and fear and so many other things.
And so, I need this morning to hear the invitation of Jesus –
Come and see.
Come and see what it means to be a disciple,
following in the footsteps of the one
who is the lamb of God and the light of the world.
Come and see the heavens opened, and God come among us as a human person,
filled with love and grace and truth.

We are invited, this second Sunday of Christmas,
to abide in Christ who is God-with-us,
and then to bear witness to this Christ.
Bear witness to a savior who is not savior of our nation or our race or our class,
but savior of the world, who loves outcasts and cares for the poor.
Bear witness to a faith that doesn't exclude LGBTQIA neighbors,
or make women 2nd class citizens,
but embraces all with love and welcome,
affirming that all people are made in the image of God.
Bear witness to a church that is not for our own comfort and in service to ourselves,
but is a community centered in Christ serving the world.
Bear witness to a God who invites us to abide, not in anxiety,
but in hope and love.



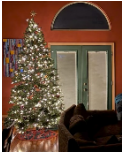
I want to share this simple story from my Lutheran Leader Moms facebook group, because it is about living as disciples and bearing witness and experiencing hope.
It makes me smile.

It's a post by Pastor Kirsten Strangeland Moore, who serves in Sacramento, CA
She begins her post with a content warning: run-on sentences 🗨️

*So-
I was REALLY annoyed because this woman who's been worshipping with us
for 15 years on and off (but had mostly stopped when I started *rumor had it*

because I'm a woman), but with us pretty solidly for the past 18 months, but never wanted to officially join or be baptized or even talk about it because she was raised Pentecostal, is being moved to AZ to be with family tomorrow...and due to circumstances was in a rehab this week but no visitors allowed. But we were finally given permission for people from the church to come say goodbye, but ONLY today (New Year's Day) at 10am. -Like none of us have anything else we want to do on New Year's Day like be with my family and maybe sleep in.*

*Anyway, after we got there, Mollie surprised me and asked me to baptize her! Y'all- I just baptized a 101 year old!!!
The Holy Spirit is going to be full of joyful surprises this year!!!*



After the season of Christmas, we enter the season of Epiphany –
the season of light and the revelation of Christ to the world.
And my Christmas tree is still up – still shining as a reminder to me
that the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness does not overcome it.

I think I'll keep it up for a while, to remind me where to abide in this new year –
In Christ, in love, in light, and in hope.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.