

Cultivating Love

Rev Brigid Beckman Third Sunday of Advent

12-16-23

Meditation:

Centered in stillness
Feel your body supported
Hands open to receive or resting on your heart
Sense your breath that is the breath of God

In this moment, in this space
Remember who you are
Let fear and worry wash away
In this moment
Open the eyes of your heart to see
There is only love
Love that heals
Love that sets you free
Love that calls you into being

Sense your Love flowing in and out with each breath... sense the presence of another being near you in body or in spirit, whose Love is also flowing forth...

Sense that each of us is a breathing, life-giving cell in the heart of the world, showing up AS love

With each in-breath, your Love expands...with each exhale your Love flows out... May we who have light to spread come forth in the world and may our Love-light heal our world.....Feel your Love expanding out into deepest space where the hand of the creator holds each planet spinning among the stars, and feel in your deepest being your kinship with the stars...

And in this moment, in this place let us remember who we are... We are love... We are each the embodiment of Love. We are Love's hands. Love's voice. Love's eyes. Love's breath. We ARE the Love that heals the broken places in our big beautiful world, and that heals our own small worlds. We are love... and Love... and LOVE...

Message:

What does it mean to walk an Advent journey into **cultivating** the seeds of hope, faith, peace, love and joy in days when the darkness of the world's senselessness-- the violence, oppression, war and blind hatred that rage around us?

In advent and winter's darkness...

“We are called away from anything that would hinder our being. The way to that Holy space within is the way of surrender. If we want to know God we must give up all our ideas about God and let the Holy One teach us from within. If we want to know God we must be willing to sit in the darkness, consumed by our longing. We will reach our well-of-knowing only when we have the courage to leap into the well- of- unknowing. There in that place of unknowing the soul is taught to trust. In that sacred space we learn to ask questions without needing answers. The question is part of the quest.

As we arrive at this dark winter time of the year, we turn our thoughts to positive aspects of darkness. We meditate on the fertile, unexplored, deep parts of our beings where so much creative energy, so much Christ-energy awaits us. The seed in the ground does not curse the darkness. Like the seed, until we surrender to the One who awaits us, we will not feel at home in the darkness. God is always waiting for us, longing for Union with us. If we can become silent enough, perhaps we will become aware of God awaiting us...

I am the one for whom God waits!

I am awaiting the One who is awaiting me!”

~Macrina Wiederkehr in ***The Circle of Life: the Heart's Journey Through the Seasons*** by Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr

- God is Love “As God has loved me, so I have loved you-- abide in me”
- We are the embodiment of God's love in our actions, in our presence.

“My God is not an old man in the sky. It's a metaphor for a mystery that absolutely transcends all categories of human thought including being and non-being but that's too many words for the back of a quarter.” That's Joseph Campbell. I got all the best teachers later in life– like Barry Taylor, the road manager for AC/DC said, “God is the name of the blanket we put over the mystery to give it a shape.” Shouldn't I have learned that in church? Why am I learning this from Barry Taylor, the road manager for AC/DC? ~Pete Holmes

[From Center for Action and Contemplation](#), Daily Meditations 12-12-23

Joan Chittister, Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow, writing from their traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, believe we all share equally in God's image, even amid our joint history of violence.

The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians, and Muslims (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), 175, 176.

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions all teach that every human being is created in the image of God. Rabbinic midrash says that when Caesar puts his image on a coin, each coin comes out identical—but that when the One who is beyond all rulers puts the divine image on the coin of every human being, each “coin” comes out unique....

Today, the various Caesars of our planet insist that we must fit into a single mold, the mold of uniformity and death.... The pain of these deaths and of this destruction drives some of [us], to forget that [we] are all children [of the same creator.]

If we are to celebrate [the Infinite God], we must in the same breath resist the idolatrous Caesars [of our day] who think to impose upon us their murders. In our banks, our kindergartens, our picket lines and voting booths, as we worship in our graceful sacred buildings and in our quiet forests and on our frenzied streets, through the seasons of our joy and of our sorrow—in all these, we must remember to welcome ourselves, each other, and all who begin as strangers into the Tent that is open to all. [1]

Richard Rohr describes how each person is created in the Divine **image**, and is called to participate in the process of growing into God’s **likeness**:

What does it mean that everything created...is somehow a partial reflection of the image of God?...If we don’t view everything as created in the image of God, what happens? ***We start picking and choosing...***

What, then, does likeness mean? In the early centuries of Christianity, the Church Fathers concluded: *image* was our **objective, unquestionable creation as a child or image of God. Likeness was our personal appropriation (our unrepeatable expression!!) of that reality.** Two people might equally be images of God, but perhaps only one chooses to become kind, forgiving, inclusive, accepting, and patient, full of the great virtues. We already have image, but **we grow in likeness. There is a dynamism toward growth, universality, and an infinite love that we can’t get rid of.**

From ***Becoming Wise***, by Krista Tippett

“What is love? answer the question through the story of your life.”

“We’ve made love private, contained it in family, when its audacity is in its potential to cross tribal lines. We’ve fetishized it as romance, when its true measure is a quality of sustained, practical care. We’ve lived it as a feeling, when it is a way of being. It is the elemental experience we all desire and seek... to give and receive.

That religious metaphor of Love-- “compassion” as “womb” is beautiful and challenging in equal measure. Consider its implicit complexity in light of the bloody, miraculous, real world experience of birth, and it tells a frank story of love in its fullness. A merger of pleasure and risk and sacrifice. A dance of alternating vulnerabilities. a wellspring of joy. A challenge of endless learning by mistake. The moment to moment evolution of care. (p.104-105)

- But how do we KNOW this? How have you been shown love? And what does it matter to know personal love, when the world is on fire with violence and destruction?
 - Sister Bernice!
 - “Time-traveling” with reminders of other storms, and other safe harbors
 - “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” —Leo Bascaglia
- Is GOD’s love big enough to hold our rage at injustice, our grief at the sorrows of the world, and our own personal heartbreaks?

[From Center for Action and Contemplation](#), Daily Meditation 12-13-23

Mirabai Starr writes of Judaism’s affirmation of *tikkun olam*—human participation in the world’s restoration:

There is a kabbalistic story in which the boundless, formless, unified Holy One wished to know its Holy Self, and so it contracted and poured itself into vessels. But the Divine Radiance was too much for these limited containers, and so they shattered, scattering shards of broken light across the universe, giving birth to all that is...

In mystical Judaism, this teaching is known as *tikkun olam*, the mending of the world. How are we to do this? The answer is: with every act of **chesed (loving-kindness)** and **tzedakah (generosity)**.

It means cultivating a contemplative practice to nurture intimacy with the Divine, making an effort to welcome the stranger and care for the Earth. It means bending close to listen for what it is our sisters and brothers on the margins

might need (and being willing to forgo our notions of what “helping” looks like, since our preconceived ideas of service sometimes get in the way of authentically serving).

It means pressing our ear to the land to hear the heartbeat of the Mother, learning to read her pulses, diagnose her ailments, intuit healing remedies. **It means slowing down enough to let the pain of the world all the way into our hearts, allowing our hearts to break open, and acting from that broken-open space.** It means stepping up with humility, with curiosity, with love. ...**our loving, kind thoughts count too. The actions [count], certainly, of course, but our loving thoughts make a difference. They help mend the world.**

God’s steadfast love birthed us-- and all of creation-- into being. In trust, we walk our Truth that we ARE the birthplace of the Christ. We ARE love, care, compassion in our personal lives, and in the world. We cultivate the gifts of the Spirit and bring hope, peace, love and joy in ever deepening faith.

And so it is. Amen.