



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Advent Good News – Joy and Sadness

December 18, 2016

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

Clay Luthy served in the Air Force and was deployed three times in the Middle East. After several knee surgeries, including a replacement, he could not continue to serve. He had regular pain and was at risk of falling. To help him out he has Charlotte, a loving Golden Retriever who watches his every step. With her around, he takes less pain medication and if he were to fall, she is there to help him get back up. Back home in Abilene, Texas, Clay was looking for a job but most employers were not welcoming of a dog on the worksite. One day, Clay's wife remarked, half sarcastically, "why don't you work at Lowe's; you're there most of the time anyway!" So he applied for a job and took Charlotte along for the interview, figuring it was better to know up front. The manager said, "no problem, there are many service dogs around the Lowe's company." Clay and Charlotte were hired. She comes to work wearing her Lowe's vest that Clay made from one of the company aprons. While she rarely takes her eyes off of Clay, she does have time to be adored by shoppers of all ages, particularly the kid-sized ones. The Abilene Lowe's shoppers love the fact that their store made room for this nice guy who had served his country well and for the dog that takes care of him. The Abilene Lowe's became more than a building supply store; it has become a reminder of hope and kindness.

I have enjoyed bringing these Advent stories to you. They have held some space of hope even as we have watched in horror the images from Aleppo of children in shock, bewilderment and pain. Do they think that no one cares? Or do they think that no one cares enough to stop the terror in which they live? These Advent stories of goodness and a vision of a better world have had a hard time balancing out what has happened to our country. For every sweet story of a god man and his dog, there are ten of people turning on each other. These stories have felt like trying to light a match in a hurricane. They feel futile to me at times. But I keep looking for them. I want to keep looking for them at the same time I want to do something...anything... to stop at least some of the pain that's out there.

And then something helped me see that these stories of goodness and the news of suffering are not an either/or thing. They exist simultaneously in a both/and world. We cannot experience either one without being mindful of the other. I've spent a lot of time with people who are very sick this week. And you might think that that would be such a hard thing but in each and every case, I have seen something else stubbornly shining through the weariness of pain and spasms of fear. I have seen Christ.

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It was Jan Richardson, poet, artist, priest and widow who put the words to this inspiration here. She wrote this in her blog *The Advent Door*, "This is what Christ came to show us, to embody in our midst. In our keenest sorrow, in our deepest darkness, Christ entered as joy enfleshed. He showed us that celebration is not a someday thing, a state of joyous completion that we cannot attain until life gets better. Rejoicing is what happens when, in the midst of the darkness that attends us, we open our hearts to the Christ who comes to us still. Celebration is what happens when we allow sorrow to have its say but refuse to let it have the final word."

Blessing the Desert

Ask me what
this blessing sounds like
and I will tell you
about the wind
that hollows everything
it finds.

I will tell you
about locusts
who chose this night
to offer their awful,
rasping song.

I will tell you
about rock faces
and how it sounds
when what was sturdy
and solid
suddenly shears away.

But give me long enough,
and I will tell you also
how beneath the wind,
a silence,

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not of absence
or of agony
that leaves all speechless
and stricken
when it comes,
but of rest,
of dreaming,

of the seed
that knows its season

and the wordless
canticle of stars
that will not cease
their singing
even when we cannot bear
to hear.

—Jan Richardson
from *The Cure for Sorrow*

Advent, with its quiet, mysterious ways, its persistent whisper through the din of December, comes to an end this week. I pray for all of us and for the whole world that we are well prepared to be ones through whom joy and newness will be born.