

“Bridges”



Reflections for the Seasons of Advent and Christmas
2017-2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
1601 Virginia Street East
Charleston, WV 25311

December 3, 2017 – Advent I

“For unto us a child is born”

Episcopalians are sort of odd – but you may already know that!

When the season of Advent arrives, we make sure no mention of Christmas finds its way into the church before Christmas Eve – no greenery, no carols, nothing. But truth be told, we really want it to be Christmas. Doing what we do (that is to say, not doing what everyone else does) is a strain.

We want to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus – the first coming.

The lessons insist on pointing us to the second coming.

No baby meek and mild. Instead the Lord sweeping back into the world in judgment.

Is Advent the beginning or the end? First coming or second?

For me, the answer is *both*.

To see Advent as heralding the second coming of Jesus is to put us on notice that we are held to account. There are consequences. To see Advent anticipating the birth of a child is to show us the wonder of God incarnate, of God who loves us enough to become one of us, to live and die as one of us. And to see Advent as both is to see the fullness of God’s love for us.

As we traverse Advent, let us remember both images of Jesus. Let us consider in our hearts the gift God gives us. Isaiah did not see it but understood:

“...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God,
The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Innocent newborn? Awesome final judge? Jesus past or future? If choosing one excludes the other, don’t choose. Embrace both – Emmanuel – God with us now until the end of the age.

The Reverend Kent Higgins is a retired Episcopal priest who has served on the board of WVIS.

December 4, 2017

“When he entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him, and appealed to him,” (v5) Matthew 8:5-11

In preparation for my reflection today using the Gospel reading, I could never get past verse 5. Giving time and silence to the few words I was reminded of such a day I too approached God, and appealed to him, for the life of another. From the depths of my pain and anguish I made my plea. Suddenly I saw Jesus hanging on the cross and blood was dripping from his torn body. Angels on both sides of the cross had buckets and were scooping up his blood. A nurse rolled my son’s bed under the cross and the angels poured the blood over him. I spoke up and said, “Lord, but what about Mr. Chapman (a family I befriended) and all the other patients on 2nd. floor?” From both ends of the long corridor, nurses began rolling up patients to the cross to receive Jesus’ blood. Then everything disappeared.

Sitting at a small round table in the ICU waiting room at the NCU Medical Center, I looked around to see if anyone else had seen and heard what had just happened. Taking a small paper napkin from the table I wrote down everything that I had witnessed.

The small piece of folded paper is still in my possession and the sacred mystery of that day in October 2010 is held within the deep recesses of my soul. The mystery continues to birth life, giving new meaning to God’s merciful love. Bridges are built when we share our stories, whether 2000 years ago or 10 years ago, allowing ourselves to become disciples.

Prayer Practice for today:

- 1) Approach Jesus- acknowledging his presence at the beginning and end of each day.
- 2) Appeal to Jesus- sharing concerns and cares of the day.
- 3) Gratitude-a simple “thank you” for Jesus being near.

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December 5, 2017
Smile at the obstacle
for it is a bridge.
~Medusa

In my experience there is nothing like a two-week vacation living with beloved family and friends to remind me that we **can't** convince people by challenging their longest and most firmly held opinions.

A holiday spent in a small beach house with 10 people from various backgrounds, perspectives and opinions has the potential to build or destroy relationships. I encountered this threat within the first two days of our vacation when I was the sole witness of **two loved ones** aggressively trying to protect and prove their opposing political view to the other.

I was able to defuse the heated debate when I asked the more aggressive of the two “tell me what has made you come to that conclusion?” “Tell me why you feel that way?” “I respect you as a person so help me understand where you are coming from”. And then I calmly listened for common ground. The bridge between us was our mutual compassion for the poor and afflicted. Something revealed to us when we took time to understand each other instead of wasting energy on trying to prove each other wrong.

Meditation

May those with a different opinion give me the opportunity to practice being more loving.

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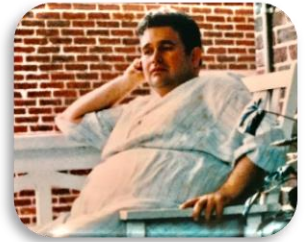
December 6, 2017

At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them.

MT 15:29-37

This gospel reading has so much bridge building in it. Jesus heals the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute the gospel reading went on to say how astonished the crowds were to see these people become “whole”.

I reflect upon the times my older brother was a bridge-builder. I recall the times he “assumed his position” on our front porch (his mountain top) in his favorite rocking chair. From that position, he would see neighbors off to work and welcome them back home in the evening, holler at ‘kids’ playing in the street that cars were coming, gather the neighborhood dogs at his feet – doing the work he was put here to do. I did not realize at the time, because I was too involved with my childhood busy-ness, that I was witnessing the work of God right on my front porch. ‘Pacie’ was the bridge to welcoming, safety, and love to our neighborhood. You see, ‘Pacie’ was one of the Jesus special children on the mountain of today’s reading.



Prayer Practice:

How have you been a bridge builder to those who are on the ‘fringes’ of society? Do you look the other way when you see someone in need or ‘different’? Today, while going about your daily activities, be conscious of the ways you can reach out – to be a bridge - to someone with whom you come in contact who may need you!



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December 7, 2017
"Building Bridges"



What a great theme for this year's Advent reflections...so apropos for myself and the Sisters who will join together in our new motherhouse in Mendham, NJ! Leaving places we all love, moving to a new state or moving next door, so much letting go, so many goodbyes, downsizing, and all the emotions that go along with that are struggles we are experiencing, and at the same time looking forward to our new life together in a beautiful new home. And, I know that many of you have experienced or are experiencing the same range of life changes, practical issues, and some very intense emotions.

Building our lives together only happens when we do it together and with God. As I journey into Advent and keep this "bridge building" in mind, I envision God bridging into our human realm when Gabriel asked Mary to be the mother of Jesus, the mother of God. Mary is the bridge between the divine and the human. May she bring us to her Son as we say "Yes" to our journey to and with God.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Think of the journeys in your life. Who was God's bridge for you as you moved from one place to another, one job to another, through sadness to joy, etc.? Have you been a bridge for someone else?

Pray with Mary, "Behold, I am the handmaid (bridge-builder) of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word."

Then, in our day to day journey with those we meet, be the bridge for them by listening to others thoughts before your own; protecting everything said in confidence; being open, honest, and transparent; and maintaining momentum by encouraging.

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December 8, 2017

Luke 1:26-38

Announcement of the Birth of Jesus

Mary has always played a significant part in my spiritual journey. In the description of how Mary received the news of the Immaculate Conception from the angel Gabriel, she humbly said yes, and thus realized God's plan for her life. She could not fully understand the course that her son's life would take, but she knew it was her purpose to give to humanity, the Son of God.

It was in the years of preparation for World Youth Day that I learned of the deep devotion that Pope John Paul II had for Mary, and especially Fatima. My own devotion for her increased as I read and studied and shared the history over time. My interest grew stronger as Pope Francis related his love and devotion for Mary, Un-doer of Knots. Now, Mary is central to my devotion now for I have felt the comfort of having her intercede for me, in that I feel she has felt the same dilemmas and suffered the same sorrows. The rosary shared with others weekly and first Saturday devotion has renewed my strength and love of Jesus, through Mary.

I realize that Mary has been a bridge to further strengthen my faith and my loving relationship with Jesus.

Prayer practice: Today, with a vision of Mary, as she is saying YES in response to God's plan for her, pray the rosary. Allow Mary to be the bridge that strengthens your love of God and His purpose for your life.



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December 9, 2017

*While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears:
"This is the way; walk in it" ~ Isaiah 30:21*



I got excited when I learned that this year's reflection theme is bridges. I love walking along water – any kind of water – and end up taking lots of pictures of bridges. I took this one early in the morning not far from Point Park in Pittsburgh while I was visiting for a conference a few years ago. Walking along the path I was struck by the way the bridge's reflection in the water made a complete circle.

Bridges are all about connection, they fill in the gaps – linking two places, two peoples, two cultures, or even two pieces of music together. Like many of us in West Virginia, I live in a city sandwiched between the river and the mountains and dissected by train tracks. We are hemmed in by topography, natural or otherwise. When I first moved here I kept bumping up against the boundaries that created dead end streets. Though I could see it just over there, there was no easy way to reach my destination.

Prayer Practice: This advent, what connection are you seeking? What divisions in your life need a bridge to bring them to completion?

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