



Ramallah Friends Meeting

Advent Meditation 2015

How Can I Keep from Singing?

Advent is upon us, my Friends.



Wherever we find ourselves and regardless of our circumstance, this season beckons us to pause, to prepare our hearts, and to appreciate the Giver's gifts ever more deeply. But how? How to pause and open our hearts when life is so hard and death so close?

Today, the violent policies of a nearly half-century military occupation seem more closely coupled with overt racism and identity-based discrimination than ever before. These past few months have been very distressing for those of us living in Palestine. So, too, is direct and indiscriminate violence being felt in an increasing number of countries around our world. Each day is like the ice of the hardest winter and we wonder how much longer we can go on.

Yet, is it not, at precisely such times as these, that we must heed the Advent call?

In such times as these we are invited to tap ever deeper into the wellspring of our common humanity. We are called to root ourselves ever-more firmly in a posture of gratitude. Surely, when we do so our faith is refreshed and our Spirit renewed –no matter the state of our bodies and our surroundings. And wide open are our lives to the expectant wonder of Advent and the coming of the Blessed Community where all are cherished without exception.

Although it is December, there are still a few olives left on the tree in my back courtyard. For those of you who have visited my home, you may remember this beautiful olive tree. What a joy it is to wake up to the sound of birds singing, as they sit perched in the tree. They seem to call other birds to share their food. It is as if their music invites the whole community of birds to gather together in celebration. Their joy is infectious and I bask in their sweet notes, appreciating both their beauty and the bounty of the season's olive harvest. The birds and their seemingly unceasing optimism, remind me of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary certainly lived under the harsh realities of empire. And many years later, in the same land I, too, live under the harsh realities of empire. I feel that Mary, who I call Our Lady of Palestine, stands by me. She witnesses day in and day out to the harshness of our experience, to the reality of life under a brutal and prolonged occupation. She sees the rich oppressing the poor, the powerful lording their authority over society's most vulnerable.

Mary witnesses to the seen and unseen walls of exclusion, to livelihoods stolen, homes demolished, lands confiscated, water rights violated, freedom of movement restricted, access to holy sites forbidden, human spirits being bent to the breaking point and lives extinguished. The disregard of human rights has become routine, as years roll into decades, and decades into generations. She watches and she knows.

Yes, Mary, Our Lady of Palestine, shares our lived reality even today. She understands and she stands with us as we experience the heavy hand of empire.

Likewise, in her time, in the shadow of the Roman Empire, Mary bore witness. She sang to God, the Truth and the Light. She sang with full-throated confidence in God's deliverance of the captives and release for those living under lawless oppression.

She proclaimed through song that God will turn the world upside down --lower mountains, and raise valleys. God will bring down empire and raise a new human community of all God's people. God will restore balance, equality, and well-being to humankind.

And yet I ask myself how, after 67 years of dispossession and 48 years of occupation and denial of all basic rights, can I continue to witness and sing joyfully, as did Mary?

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (Luke 1: 46-49)

In Luke's account, the unwed Mary seeks support from another woman: Elizabeth. Together, the two women rejoice in God's liberating action of new life; they are filled with the Holy Spirit which will later work through their sons. John will, in his own ministry, call for an upturning of societal norms as he instructs people to share their abundance, to be fair in their dealings, and to uphold justice in their daily lives. Ultimately, he asks the people to repent from the evils and vanities of society.

John's call is just as valid and hard-hitting today. We have plenty of reasons to repent: militarism, fanaticism, disregard for pluralism, and a lack of attention to refugees and other vulnerable children of God. John calls the crowd to prepare themselves for the One who will baptize them in the Holy Spirit. As he does so, he renews the prospect of hope for a new order where justice is abundant and the well-being of all life is assured.

The future that God promises of well-being for people of all faiths, races and identities without exception is not to be awaited passively. It is born in us today, from our flesh and blood, from our commitments and struggles for justice. It becomes the hope for those who do not have hope. A hope that abounds in Mary's humble song.

How then, my Friends, can we keep from singing?

May this Christmas season be a time of renewal of our commitment to one another and hope in Christ!



Jean Zaru
Clerk, Ramallah Friends Meeting

Prayer:

You have come to us in all of our times of weakness and doubt. But you bring a promise of new life, a future of justice, an abundance of well-being. Instill in us the confidence to not only hope for justice, but to search for your vision of justice in our lives, in our communities, in our country, and in our world. Help us to challenge oppressive habits so that we may join together toward a common understanding of God's hope for us.

Friends meet Sunday at 10:30 am for unprogrammed Meeting for Worship.

Everyone is welcome to attend.

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