

Advent IV – The non-sermon

Michele Rae Rizoli

I could have preached the sermon I worked on this week.

I could stay on theme and tell you all about my visits to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

I could tell you about the hell of the Christians living behind a Wall, of religions fighting and killing over property, of children being apprehended and persecuted.

I could tell you about the ramifications and interpretations and specifications of Mary's revolutionary song; of Joseph's choice to act against social norms and to choose God's way of acceptance and not to conform.

I could alert you to pay attention to your dreams, your visions, your fleeting glimpses of the Divine and to treasure them.

I could elaborate about how God seems to appear more clearly in the absence of privilege, to poor people in situations and where the utter dependence on the Divine is a necessity and not a choice.

I could even mention my sobering realization that, because of my own privilege, I likely would have missed Jesus' coming, as surely as the religious leaders at the time missed it.

I could tell you about the many layers of meaning of Christmas I read about during Advent, the historical origins, the theological ramifications: Process theology, Feminist theology, hermeneutics and historical criticism, the pros and cons of Maryology, the ethical and spiritual implications of submission, the parallel gospels, the possibility or necessity of a virgin birth, the power of myth and symbolic repetition, atonement theories and mystical perspectives.

But I'm not going to do that.

If I were to take the path of the sermon, I would also tell you that Jesus' birth (and life) was the point of his coming, that its not all about Jesus waiting around for crucifixion or "needing" to die for our intrinsic sins. But that his very birth – whether miraculous or not – and his adoption by a step-father, were acts of love for humanity and for the world.

I would tell you of the universal cosmic Christ saying yes to the material world.¹ Of darkness and of light.

I would tell you that the Spirit's presence in a manger, in the messiness of an impromptu home-birth to insignificant parents means that there is nowhere we can flee from God's loving presence, nowhere.

I would assure you that there is no one who is not worthy or who is out of reach of God's love. And If I were preaching a sermon, I would repeat that point, there is no one who is not worthy or who is out of reach of God's love.

I would tell you that God has been with us, has been Emmanuel, since before the day we ourselves were born. That we carry the spark of God's love within us.

If I were to preach a sermon, those are the things I might have said.

But instead, with the time allotted to me this morning, I want to give you a **gift** in the form of a time of reflection. Our minds are already full to overflowing.

What might happen if we quiet them? What might we hear?

We are going to take a few moments. Here are a few things you can do with this unexpected gift of a few moments quiet time:

- Open yourself up to God's Spirit
- Let the scriptures or the hymns we've sung so far speak to you.
- Find a word that stood out, turn it around, repeat it to yourself
- Or look at the olive-wood carving and imagine yourself as the child that God embraces.
- keep track of your breath,

¹ Richard Rohr Advent reflection.

- maybe experience being bored
- if you're a kid see how long you can keep quiet, twiddle your thumbs
- pray
- wonder
- Ask God to refresh you, to show you something you need to see or to understand.

Don't worry about how long it's going to be, I will attend to that and will let you know when we are done.