

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 21st 2018

As a child, when I was afraid, or if I had a bad dream, I remember hiding under my bed. It never took too long for my parents to find me, bring me out, and because I trust them, my feelings of fear were always for a brief moment. I had the feeling of being that child again when I read the scripture today. I felt as if I had been hiding in my dark place of worry and mental clutter, peeking out through the one hole in the wall, wondering when the relentless storm of daily anxieties will be over; wondering when it will be safe to emerge into my day; into my life. In this case though, it was God looking back at me through the hole in the wall with a smile, saying, “O daughter of mine, trust me, take my hand, arise from this dark place, and live”. I believe, so I arise, I live, and I feel happiness. Yes, happiness. I feel almost certain that I know what happiness looks like and feels like but is it the same as joy. How often do we feel real joy? What does our joy look like and feel like? It seems to me that we constantly have to work on feeling happy, but joy already resides in us; it is our inheritance as children of God. So why do we look for it elsewhere? I am talking about the type of joy that exudes from the first reading and psalm or the type of joy that was shared between two expecting mothers--Elizabeth and Mary--that was so powerful and pure that Elizabeth's baby felt it, heard it, and also leaped for joy. I am talking about the indescribable joy we feel when we receive good news. This joy, true joy, lays dormant most of the time, and could be stolen if we are not vigilant. Have there been moments when we allowed our joy to be snatched away from us even for a brief second?

During this Advent, depending on where we are in our lives, and what spiritual lens we use, today's readings will have different meanings to us. One thing for sure is that we can't help but feel a movement in our souls when we read the scripture today. This movement feels like the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of this movement is Joy; leaping exuberant Joy. I must confess that my week has been a bit trying. I have felt the need to persuade myself to be in a good mood ---after all, it is advent, and Christmas is around the corner. I had grown weary of waiting and people telling me about perseverance, and then, I read today's readings. These readings are like a good friend leading me by the hand, skipping to a place called hope. The readings leave no room for us to hide in our pain, or wallow in the darkness, or cover our faces. The readings call us to rise because we are beloved; to rise and journey with joy in our hearts because we are beloved. We are to go through life with exuberance and triumph, because any darkness in our life is about to be cancelled by the incoming radiance of light; any sadness is about to be turned into jubilation. We are to rise, rejoice, and remember our gift of joy.

Our readings today can be seen as an invitation to experience a new day; a new season; a new beginning. It is an invitation to us, God's lovely children, to come out of our hiding places—wherever that place may be—and arise into life. All pain from illness, loss or loneliness, all struggles of the everyday of life, all that sends us into hiding, or leaves us crouching down with our heads in our laps and our eyes shut, are all temporary. The sweet fragrance of joy is always with us if we don't get distracted by the things that steal it from us and send us into hiding.

Rejoice! O daughters and sons of God, do not be discouraged, God rejoices over you, wait for the birth of good news in your life. There is a new day on the horizon, so let us make room in the cradle of our hearts for the love of God. Let us live in joy; exuberant joy.

Vivian Amu-Creighton University's St. John's Parish Church