

Kingdom Peaking

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Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (from Richard Rohr's daily meditations)

The glory of the anawim (Hebrew for "the poor of Yahweh") is their salvation by God alone. The anawim, the little ones, know they cannot do it or do it alone. They rely on others. Their greatest blessing is not what they have accomplished but what God has done for them.

When Mary appeared to the poor native, Juan Diego, on Dec. 12 in 1531, she chose not to speak to the clergy, to the educated, to the Spanish oppressors, but to one of the uneducated and oppressed ones, just like herself. She knew the pattern well.

For Luke, Mary is the exemplary "poor one of Yahweh," for what has been accomplished in her is far beyond her own worthiness or power. And so, after the angel has said it, after Elizabeth has said it, Mary too proclaims how blessed she herself is. She believes them! And then Juan Diego believes her! Thus, the divine mirroring passes through history.

Luke 1: 46-55

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the LORD, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

It is Christmas now. Yes, I could be holding us to the old tradition that we don't begin the celebration until Christmas Eve - that we sing the somber songs of Advent, that we look at our lives and move away the stuff that prevents the Christ child from coming in.

But we have been in pseudo-Christmas since October – maybe earlier. We are been preparing in our own ways to the coming of Christmas. We made our lists; perhaps we braved the malls at ridiculous hours. perhaps we prided ourselves on never stepping in a brick and mortar store, but were able to get everything we needed online, wrapped in pretty paper (with a corporate logo somewhere) and shipped without us ever touching anything but our plastic.

We may have shortened the lists this year – or given smaller presents. We were more careful of which gift cards we purchased, to make sure there was more gift card for those we intended than for the corporation supplying them.

We have been preparing alright. Perhaps steeling ourselves is a better term. Martha and Oprah have told us how to get ready – the pre-Christmas cooking has already begun. Some are ignoring it entirely, their loved ones are gone or somewhere else and Christmas will just be a time to be endured.

So perhaps we have been preparing long enough – or maybe not at all. Either way, we have been taken with the beauty of this Sanctuary and we have been inspired by the singing of the messiah and “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” We have ordered our poinsettias and sent our Christmas Cards. It is Christmas in Delaware; it is Christmas at Concord.

We have been preparing, but for what? Sometimes it feels like I prepare a list and the final end of that list making it that things have been checked off the list. There has been very little engagement, very little heart in the effort. It is easy to happen to anyone, it is easy to happen to a pastor. Is the worship planning done? Check.... Is the Christmas Eve service ready for the choir? Check... I have written or found the appropriate prayers and response? Check.... How about that new communion prayer, will it work? Should I end the service on the soft note of ‘Silent Night’ or the loud joyous peal of “Joy to the World?”

But what I am really looking for, what I am really working towards for you and for myself are kingdom moments. I want those moments – or even a moment, when I get to experience not life as it is, but life as it truly could be. The story of Christ's birth is a subversive, upside-down story of the kingdom of hope and love, which allows us to see our worldly, mall or internet type kingdoms as the nasty shacks that they are.

Suddenly, in a way we never expect, at a time when it just couldn't possibly happen, God's love breaks through the way sunshine shatters into impossible colors on the beach at dusk. Our perspective changes, what is important changes, our lives change and we sing songs of praise, just like Mary did. WE glimpse impossible scenes – of lions and lambs lying down together – no longer predator and prey, but equals.

It is what I wait for, what I watch for – I think all of us in our own ways do. It has happened at big family celebrations, it has crept quietly into the room when I have been alone at Christmas and

weeping. It has burst upon me in the light of the Luminarias, the note of a song. I have been hugged and the hug was not really from my aunt, but from an angel. I have been swept into the best of memory by the children's pageant. I have remembered the finest meals I have ever eaten while filling a paper plate at a church potluck.

For a brief moment I have seen and been part of the kingdom of heaven. The indwelling Christ has REALLY indwelled; God has been with ME and well as with US. The Kingdom peeks through.
"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight..."

That is what I pray for you to know this season. But be warned, you cannot put it on a list, you cannot buy this glimpse of heaven, not matter what the Lexus ad says. It almost always happens in relationship to someone else. In relation to God - in relation to each other. Not in relation to your lists... Real Presence, not wrapped presents. The gift of time, the gift of laughter, the gift of love. No matter how much the children in your life want those darned little fake hamsters, it rarely happens then. It happens when you hold them and tell them your stories of Christmas, when you share you time.

Perhaps it happened today when the children came in – a moment where you saw God's world as it was intended. Perhaps next week; perhaps you will catch a glimpse of heaven when you hear the Cantata or on Christmas Eve when we worship together. Maybe a friend meets you for coffee and you relax into the moment. Perhaps Christmas morning, when that phone call comes from someone far way and you feel their love. It happens when we reach out to another, when they least expect it. It happens when someone reaches in, when we least expect it.

Our lists are wrong, my friend. Our lists are of things, events - they are boundaries of one sort or another that can cut us off from each other and from Christ.

Try this one....

Be watchful
Be still
Be present
Be together
Be worshipful

Be amazed!

The light you see will be tinged with heaven's colors, the sound that slips on the faraway wind will be Heaven's voice, the smells will be of Heaven's bounty and the touch will be of Heaven's Child.

"Joy to the World..."