

Christmas 2011

Dear Family and Friends:

One of the liturgical customs of the church we attend in Washington, D.C. is to celebrate the Christmas season with an Advent wreath decorated with five candles. A candle is lit each Sunday of Advent and on Christmas and the lighting is accompanied by readings from Scripture and a short meditation on the significance of what we are commemorating. Last Sunday, we lit the peace candle and reflected on the angelic announcement to the befuddled shepherds in the fields:

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people on whom His favor rests".
(Luke 2:13-14)

As I watched from the balcony, I found myself musing over this past year. We have enjoyed a generous measure of peace and good fortune and have been blessed with pleasant circumstances.

As much as we have enjoyed the blessings of this past year, the angelic announcement recorded by Luke does not proclaim the type of peace which is the happenstance of pleasant circumstance. Within a short time, Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus were fleeing to Egypt to avoid the murderous intentions of King Herod. Heartbreak soon visited local families with children under two years of age, whose only fault was to be in the area in which Jesus was born. Their infant children were butchered to satiate the paranoia of a half-crazed tyrant. No, the peace proclaimed transcends circumstance and our frail attempts at buttressing our own well-being.

That truth brings us back to RV's ruminations during last week's liturgical moment. The peace proclaimed by the angelic host is an inside job in the first instance. The truth is that RV has been quite anxious over the course of this past year. New responsibilities at work contributed to this and these were complicated by the contentious uncertainty which attended recent sessions of Congress. However, central to his angst is his own failure to consistently own the peace that Jesus offers. This is a quiet confidence that we are in God's hands amid health concerns, trials on the outside, or concerns with people and events beyond our reckoning. He is sovereign, his steadfast love and mercy abound, and we can rest there.

The peace candle and what it represents is intricately tied to the life and death of the child whose birth we celebrate each year. I was filled with gratitude as I watched the candle being lit in our church's Advent wreath. Yes, for pleasant circumstance, but even more for a peace that surpasses happenstance and finds its rest beyond the storm.

From our home to yours – Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.