

Second Sunday of Advent

We sometimes behave our worst toward those we love the most. Friends take jabs at each other. Kids yell at their parents. Spouses speak harshly when they feel under pressure. In a weird way, this behavior often aims to affirm the strength of love. It communicates the message, "I love you, and I trust that you love me so much that I can be my worst self with you because you will still be at my side when I'm done." It's not a healthy way to relate, and sometimes it causes a once loving relationship to crack.

Our culture promotes people who put others down, express anger, and avoid thoughtful dialogue. We witness discourtesy in political campaigns, talk radio, and social media. We may be falsely led to believe that kindness and understanding are signs of weakness, that anger and self-promotion signify strength. Meanwhile, violence grows at such a pace that Kansas City is shattering its murder record this calendar year.

Perhaps especially now, the prayer we offer in today's psalm takes on more poignancy: "Lord, let us see your kindness." Surrounded by people who are not kind, who seize upon our weakness, who will not listen to others, who use abusive words, who hit and punch, steal and kill, who perversely think that these actions are virtues - perhaps especially now in this moral desert we turn to God the source of all good and ask, "Could we at least see some kindness from you?"

We don't always feel it. Sometimes we pray but don't receive the answer we want. We ask for a family member's improved health, a better-paying job, an end to violence on our streets, sometimes in vain. Some people wonder, "Is God listening? Does God really care?"

Advent reassures us that God does care, and in fact did care so much that God entered history to take on human flesh. The coming of Jesus reassures us that God understands all that we endure and promises something better. God has already given us the gift of salvation in Christ. This kindness rules over every hateful act. Psalm 85 imagines that truth springs up from the earth and justice rains down from heaven. Just as the Word of God entered the womb of the virgin Mary, so do earth and heaven unite in wondrous ways we could never imagine. God created a world where we can discern truth and justice, desire them, and achieve them. We can foster these values every day.

This month brims with opportunities for goodwill. The music and decorations of the season summon us beyond our everyday existence to perceive something more grand and glorious, more beautiful than the bad behavior that surrounds us. When you use this month to show love, give generously, and proclaim Christ, you are already helping other people see the kindness of the Lord for which they pray. And if you do find yourself speaking hateful words to people you love, putting down the efforts of coworkers, classmates or children, please realize that you are part of the reason why others have to sing this psalm, "Lord let us see your kindness." But you can easily be the kindness that others long to see.

Sunday, December 10, 2017