

Nov. 28, 2021 First Sunday of Advent
Pr. Steve

In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the beginning God said, 'Let there be poetry', and we came to life!
You are the poems--have you forgotten? And God saw that it was *tov*,
that it was really good, and that the poetry is life-generating. That's what *tov*
really means in Hebrew. God saw all that is, and it is life-generating.

Poem: *Into the Wild Unknown*
By Forest Fein

*It is so easy to get lost in this world,
with all of its distractions,
false promises,
and shiny toys.
Forgive yourself for getting lost.
For not knowing where you are,
or who you are.
For having no clue what you truly want
or the direction you are going.
The world we have created
is designed to make you forget,
is designed to make you lose your way,
confuse you,
disconnect you from yourself,
and what is truly nourishing to you.
Forgive yourself for being lost.
Forgive others for being lost.
To find yourself,
find others who inspire you,
who encourage you,
to discover and live,
a life that is authentic to your being.
Fill your ecological niche.
No Redwood is the same.
No cloud.
It is only the limitation of language,
that puts everything in a box,
flattens it,
and destroys its unique beauty.
Exchange words for images,
and allow your imagination to run wild.*

*Remember the rational mind will not get you there.
The rational mind is what got us into this mess in the first place.
Reclaim your soul.
Reclaim your heart.
Reclaim your body,
as a sacred expression,
of the indestructible mystery,
from which we all came,
are sustained,
and will inevitably return.
You are not separate from life.
I repeat, you are not separate from life.
This is the great confusion.
Reclaim your seat at the table of beings and feast.
What you accept as life,
is but a fragment,
a sliver,
of what this vast universe has to offer.
Don't short-change yourself.
Go on the grand adventure.
Take leave of the familiar,
and step into the wild unknown.
I will meet you there.*

- Forest Fein

The beginning of happiness is understanding that a life without wonder isn't worth living. That's Psalm 19, the original Hebrew. Did you get that? The beginning of happiness, the beginning of wisdom, is understanding that a life without wonder and amazement isn't worth living.

You may have all your ducks in a row. Congratulations!
Ha. Not worth living.

I hope you had a happy Thanksgiving.

Yes, we had a tremendous Thanksgiving celebration last Sunday [afternoon] out on the Labyrinth. It was amazing. We kept saying to each other, 'Everybody in the world is here!'

150-200 people-- Muslim young men chanting ancient Islamic Prayers--haunting, Bahá'í children drumming, moving the hearts and souls, Chinese choirs of children,

the St. Joan of Arc band playing,
and Drew [Cremisio] and Daniel [Jones] topping it off, playing Stevie Wonder's
'It's Magic'. Don't you get it? The people, the gathering--it's magic. It's magic!

Of course, there were some Lutheran wannabes--Mary and Philippa made clear if
they could qualify.

So, how come life has become so harsh? Why are so many mean things going on,
in the airports and school board meetings, and shopping malls? What's happening
to us?

It's a new year. Are you ready for a new beginning? Please?

Jewish theologian, mystic, profound thinker, Martin Buber, said at the beginning of
the previous century, "The modern world has become a place of commotion. It's all
discombobulated, disordered, incoherent."

It's like watching the evening news. You know, the anchors sit next to each other--
read, scroll, image, scroll, breaking news--there is no breaking news! Just another
ordinary day. *What happened on the news? Nothing.*

Commotion surrounding us, enveloping us, discouraging us, right? *Why should we
bother? What's the point?* It's overwhelming. Just overwhelming.

So, three comments/insights, about this commotion that Buber describes.
The first is rationality will not fix it. In fact, Buber says, 'Rationality is the
daughter of commotion.' *We were so close to getting all put together again, weren't
we? If our computers would only go faster, faster--they'll solve it for us.*
Wrong.

So I'm inviting you this Advent to take your expectation level away from
'somebody out there is going to fix it.' We don't have solutions sitting on the shelf
out there. Rationality helps with strategies, but not solving the crisis of what's
going on.

Second comment.

We hear in the Genesis story of this sublime harmony and unity, in which the
Creator is living with the wholeness of creation. It's so good. It's life-generating. It
is such a blessing.

But the message most of us have gotten, and, unfortunately usually from religion, is that we are separate from God. The typical religious accusation: *If you measure up, you might stand a chance of pleasing God. Religious Life means crawling out of the Grand Canyon on your knees. Be humble, at least for once. Crawl up on your knees, begging, and maybe God will let you in.*

And even if we don't like that version, we're still not sure that we're ready to meet God, are we? That is so discouraging. And that separation from God, that feeling that we have, is a lie. Now, I acknowledge we feel it. We feel it. But it's a lie.

And Jesus gave himself in all his teachings, and his life itself, trying to break through to us about the intimacy of God in which we are living--*the One in whom we live and move and have our being*, the One in whom we are breathing--that this reign of God, you see, is not out there somewhere else.

Jesus keeps saying, 'Where is it? It's here in your heart. It's on your lips. It's in your hands. It's right here. Will you join me? Will you join me in loving all that is? Just, just love it. Every leaf and piece of sand. Love the sinners. Love the wicked. Love the beautiful. Will you just open that generous heart in which you've been created, my dear poems? Ahhh. Love, love what you can. Love as best you can. Love even if you're a failure at loving. Just love.

I don't know if this analogy makes sense, but I'm going to try it anyway. In Tai Chi--I learned this from my *sifu*--there are three key elements: one is exercise; the second is martial arts; and the third is meditation in movement. And these three elements must be moving in and living in a harmony, if you're really going to learn Tai Chi.

But what most of us do is--we choose one of the three. And the most popular, of course, is the martial arts component. Now, here's what begins to happen. *'Now if I'm going to get good at this, right, I'm walking on the street, and I start to defend myself. What if somebody came over my left shoulder? Attack!'* I'm always imagining, and guessing that might happen. I'm putting out combative energy. *'You want to fight?'* And guess what? You end up in more fights.

It's all backwards, you see. So, if you're walking around thinking, *'I wonder if God is out to get me?'* Fear is the response. *'Look out! Look out!'* That's what you'll be discovering, instead of *'Here is the intimate partner who wants to love me into fullness, and joy, and ease, and connection.'*

So I've decided to assign you an ancient, advanced spiritual discipline which I've learned from nuns and monks over the years. For the Advent month of December, I want you to sunbathe. That's your assignment. Is it too hard to bear?

And you know why this works, and I'm serious--

When I invite people to--'Meditate and sit there in stillness, and smile, and just be present,' people say, *'I can't do that. I've got too much going on in my head. This is too much for me.'*

But when I invite people to sunbathe, they get it instantly. *'I just want to sit there, and be still, and soak it in, right? Bask in the gloriousness of life, which has come to me through the sun warming every ounce of my being. I don't have to do anything. I just know that I'm loved.'*

Can you savor that for a month? Would you try that? That's the goodness of God. Do you know that? Is it too much to ask?

The third comment is that in Advent we anticipate the birth of the Christ, but in three ways:

One is the child of Bethlehem--a wonderful, wonderful celebration.

The second is, it's the birth, friends, of the universe, and eternity expanding, for now it has been permeated with infinite compassion.

And the third birth of Christ is in us.

I think that's Jesus' favorite place to be--birthed here within us again, to renew us in the joy, and the vision of the whole creation, stirring in us that soulfulness we need for these times.

The beginning of wisdom and happiness is resting and relaxing in the One whose love knows no end. That soulfulness--that's where the healing is coming from. That's where the hope is coming from. We need to practice it, and enjoy it, and live it.

Did you hear Paul in that Thessalonians passage?

'Oh my friends, I can't thank God enough for you. You inspire me. You give me courage. You give me hope.' [1 Th 3: 9]

We can go on then. Here is the love that surrounds us. It may come in children, or the leaves falling, or, who knows? The light reflected on water, and we instantly feel it, don't we? Everything lets us know we are alive.

Soulfulness invites us to enter in a communion with all life, for which we were made. And we know it down deep, don't we?
Reclaim your soul, your heart, your body.
Reclaim where we came from and where we're going.
You are not separate from life. Don't shortchange yourself. Don't pay attention to the commotion and the confusion.

'Enter the great adventure. I will meet you there.'
Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.