



In this Season of Advent/Christmas, the Children of God are reminded of our daily calling to live a fierce witness of tender mercy that defies the siren-call of the world which demands personal gain and influence above all else. The words of Jesus invite us who call him Savior and Lord, to stand with the least, the forgotten, and the voiceless, to recognize his presence in unexpected places.

This year our calling seems more than a little overwhelming! How can small acts of

kindness and mercy impact the raw landscape of our lived reality? We are inundated by news reports of nation rising up against nation, swirling accusations that are emptied of truth, and even our own families strain under the weight of fractured relationships. Dark opposition threatens to swallow whole any attempt at Christ-like conversation and civility in general seems endangered. But I say to you, "Be not afraid!" Mercy is hope with wings!

Every act of kindness, every tender mercy offered in the name of Christ: a cup of clean water, daily bread for those who hunger, an embrace that receives all people as Christ, eye contact that conveys the dignity and worth of every Child of God, companioning others in their grief, loneliness, and suffering – these seemingly small acts of mercy pierce the veil of dark delusion, revealing the indomitable light of Christ that no darkness can overcome!

As we come to the close of another year, many will look back and wonder if progress toward goals set last January have been accomplished. Others will wonder generally if they are on the right track, if all their "doing" the last twelve months has moved them toward their goals, a more purposeful life. Some will ask themselves, again, "What IS my purpose? Am I following God's will for my life?"

Often, we are deceived into thinking that a purposeful life precludes the ordinariness of our everyday experience. We say, "Surely, a purposeful life involves traveling to far-flung places, laboring in subhuman conditions, doing grand things that it seems only a select few are equipped to handle." Certainly, such lives ARE purposeful, but comparisons tend to make us downplay the gifts God has entrusted to us here and now for the sake of his children and all creation.

The recipe for a purposeful life has many variations, indicative of every time and place where God has planted and nurtured the growth of his children for the sake of mercy. Yes, mercy! The whole of the Gospel is nothing, if not filled with the Good News of God's steadfast and enduring mercy for all people! In mercy, Christ poured out his life on the cross that we may have life in his name.

From the very beginning, God mercifully willed that we have life, not just any life, but ABUNDANT life! Even while we were dead in our sins, God in Jesus Christ was reconciling us to the Father! How well we know the mercy of God personally, given thanks that we have been forgiven and NOT received what we so rightly deserved! And, if we have experienced such mercy in our very ordinary lives, and we surely have, then we cannot deny our calling/purpose to live a fierce witness of tender mercy on behalf of others. Every Child of God is called to live

mercy, to be merciful, just as our Father in heaven is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

How do we Live Mercy in December of 2016, in all of 2017, and beyond? The holy longing of Advent, our anxious counter-cultural waiting to celebrate the babe born in Bethlehem, reminds the faithful that our God who is steadfast, faithful and merciful will also fulfill the long-awaited promise of Christ's coming again in glory. While some may turn from away from the loving mercy of our God, we who hold fast to the promise of God yet to be fulfilled, continue as Jesus bid us: caring for the sick, the poor, those who hunger and thirst, the imprisoned, blind, the foreigner in our midst, and all those the world considers least.

To have experienced the mercy of God in Christ Jesus is to know the very love which created our souls. What higher calling, what greater purpose, can we imagine for ourselves as individuals or as a community of faith? In showing mercy to others, however small the acts of kindness, the love of Christ is shared in word and deed with those who long for the light and hope of Christmas. "*And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* (Matthew 25:40)" May the fruit of our Advent/Christmas journey cause us to "Live Mercy" all the days of our lives.

A Mercy-filled Advent & a Blessed Christmas to All!

God's Peace,
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