

**Notes for: It was Evening and it was Morning:  
A Retreat for Advent in Pandemic Times  
St. Andrew's Parish December 21<sup>st</sup> 2020**

**Hymn: God of Day and God of Darkness**

**(1) Where are we now.....**

This is the time to be slow,  
lie low to the wall until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can,  
not to let the wire brush of doubt scrape from your heart  
all sense of yourself and your hesitant light.

If you remain generous, time will come good;  
and you will find your feet again on fresh pastures of promise,  
where the air will be kind and blushed with beginning.

**By:** John O'Donoghue, adapted from his book, To Bless the Space Between Us (US) / Benedictus (Europe)

**(2) In the big picture, what has been happening.....**

1. The Covid 19 experience has brought us personally to new conversations about what it means to live and what it means to die. What are our values. What are we willing to commit to and what are we prepared to let go.
2. It has brought us to use different language: safe distancing, masked from nose to chin, bubbles, no touching, communicating with our eyes, sanitizing, isolation.
3. What we need to attend to: loneliness, solitude, mental health issues, grief, grief postponed, isolation.
4. It has brought the churches back to the basics. Raises questions: are we at a point where we are re-negotiating our relationship with Church?
5. Pope Francis as a beacon of light: the evening service of prayer for those ill and dying with the virus, the frontline workers.
6. What has your experience been? What one word would describe it? What was your low point? What gave you hope?

**We are not Alone** by Pepper Choplin. Sung by the Oasis Chorale.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQtjllnSK3g>

**From our spiritual elders:**

God came to us because he wanted to join us on the road, to listen to our story, and to help us realize that we are not walking in circles but moving towards the house of peace and joy. This is the great mystery of Christmas that continues to give us comfort and consolation: we are not alone on our journey. The God of love who gave us life sent us his only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that he walks with us... Christmas is the renewed invitation not to be afraid and let him -- whose love is greater than our own hearts and minds can comprehend -- be our companion.

**From:** Henri Nouwen, Gracias! A Latin American Journal.

### (3) The prophets in exile

- They speak the truth to the situation that they find themselves in.
- They listen, they dialogue, they challenge.
- They are not afraid to dream.
- They build strength for the future.

#### The life lesson

- "Don't be robbed of your joy, don't be robbed of your enthusiasm, don't be robbed of your hope, don't become pessimistic, don't become idealistic, try to be virtuous". (David Wells)
- What virtue will we focus on?

#### Aristotle's 12 Virtues

- 1) Courage – bravery
- 2) Temperance – moderation
- 3) Liberality – spending
- 4) Magnificence – charisma, style
- 5) Magnanimity – generosity
- 6) Ambition – pride
- 7) Patience – temper, calm
- 8) Friendliness – social IQ
- 9) Truthfulness – honesty, candidness
- 10) Wit – humor, joy
- 11) Modesty – ego
- 12) Justice – sense of right / wrong, indignation

#### Advent, finding the hope and joy

- Advent as a time to “be slow.”
- Advent as a time to reflect on the grace of “darkness and light.”
- Advent as a time to listen.
- Advent as a time to give.
- Advent as a time to prepare the crib and the cross.

### (4) And it was evening, and it was morning.....

In the silence of the morning, I am alive to the new day's light, alert to the early stirrings of the wind and the first sounds of the creatures. In the silence of my heart I hear the yearnings that are in me and the fears, the hopes that rise from within and the doubts that trouble my soul. In the beginnings of this day, O God, before the night's stillness is lost to the days busyness, open to me the treasures of my inner being, that in the midst of this day's busyness I may draw on wisdom. Assure me again of my origins in you, assure me again that my true depths are of you.

**From:** Sounds of the Eternal: A Celtic Psalter for Morning and Night Prayer by Philip Newell

## (5) A time to reflect

We often pray at this time of year for those grieving the loss of a loved one at Christmas time, But many also grieve the loss of someone who hasn't died: the loss of a friend to an argument or misunderstanding, the loss of a spouse through separation or divorce, the loss of family relationships through resentments and grudges, the loss of a neighbor who's moved away, the loss of those we've just lost track of, friends who've just drifted away. Christmas time brings all those we've lost back to our hearts. Let us pray that the memories be as comforting as they may be difficult...

### Dear Lord.

You know who it is, you know who they are: those I loved, and love still,  
who've slipped from my heart's embrace, from the union that once was ours,  
from the promises we once made, from the vows we once held sacred,  
from the friendship we used to enjoy, from the neighborhood we used to share...

You know who it is, Lord, you know who they are: and you know the place in my heart  
now empty for the loss of someone I loved...

This Advent and Christmas time I pray you'll come to heal my hurt,  
to mend my brokenness, to fill my emptiness with the fullness  
of your peace and your presence...

Where I'm able, help me reach out to heal and mend any pain I may have caused...  
Where I need to, help me open up to others' offers of forgiveness and of peace...  
Where there's distance, help me be the first to reach across the table or the ocean  
that keeps us from being one again...

And where the bond has broken beyond remedy or repair,  
help me accept the pain that's mine to bear and pray for him, for her, for those  
who still hold a place in my heart, even if that place be empty...

Help me see how missing someone at Christmas is remembering how I held and how  
I hold that person in my heart...

Help me seek and find the peace that only you can give, Lord,  
the peace that Christmas offers when my heart is most in need...

From: Austin Fleming's blog <http://concordpastor.blogspot.com/>

**Note:** As this piece of music is playing, listen for the sounds that come from the cello and allow yourself to be taken along with them. Be aware that as the choir begins to sing the word **Benedictus**, it is loud. If you have been snoozing, hold onto your chair.

**Benedictus** is a setting for cello and choir of a section for a Mass composed by Karl Jenkins. The choir sings the words: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." Eight minutes fourteen seconds. <https://youtu.be/eGbHnJCDMyE>

## **(6) A final thought.....**

I am constantly surrounded by noise; TV, texts, the internet, music, meaningless small talk, my thinking. All of it blocks my consciousness, my ability to hear the **Me** that exists beneath the cacophony. I am my consciousness, my awareness of my new circumstances, my presence in every moment. So, I cultivate silence every morning. I sit in it, bask in it, wrap it around myself, and hear and feel me. Then, wherever the day takes me, the people I meet are the beneficiaries of my having taken that time – they get the real me, not someone shaped and altered by the noise around me. Silence is the stuff of life.

**From:** Richard Wagamese, **Embers**. (Ojibway writer born in northeastern Ontario) 2017

**Questions for reflection and conversation:** What has happened on your journey during the time of pandemic? Who has walked beside you? What were your fears? What did you discover? What gave you joy and hope? If you were to tell a friend about your experience what do you want them to know.

### **Mary, consoler of the Afflicted**

Your prayer has been our shield throughout the day,  
In every hour of trial and of stress;  
Your name has been our solace and our hope,  
soothing each sorrow like a soft caress.  
A time of greater need will soon be here,  
when comes the sunset and our work is done;  
when daylight dies and death's dark shadows fall.  
O Mother Mary, lead us to your son.

**From:** Three Prayers from The Little Book of the Blessed Virgin - Brian O'Higgins, Dublin.

### **A Concluding Prayer**

The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and our own lives rest in you.  
The night is quiet. Let the quietness of God's peace enfold us all,  
all dear to us, and all who have no peace.

**From:** A New Zealand Prayer Book (Anglican Church of New Zealand)