



Come and See!

December 30, 2018

The Word...

Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.
How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!
My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the LORD.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Happy they who dwell in your house!
Continually they praise you. Happy those whose strength you are!
Their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage.
(Psalm 84)

Pondering the Word...

There's been a lot of research about the importance that being in nature has for our mental and physical health. Scientists sound the alarm about generations staying inside, addicted to media and electronic gadgets, spending no time even being in nature much less interacting with it. Everything from our short-term memories to inflammation and even cancer are positively impacted by being outdoors. Unfortunately for some, just finding fresh air or a safe environment in which to be in nature is getting harder.

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord," this magnificent earth you have created for us to enjoy and nurture. The Living God for which both my heart and flesh cry out is found, not on illuminated phone screens and laptops, and not just in darkened sanctuaries and churches, but in forests and fields and mountains and seashores. Our hearts and souls yearn for the pilgrimage back to the Garden from whence we came.

But the Garden is at risk, due again to our greed and lack of awareness. Our need for immediate gratification and for the 'latest thing,' at least in the West, has led to a throw-away culture of waste and overuse; it is the coming generations who will pay the price. As the indigenous people's proverb warns, *"We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."*

Let us resolve, as a new year is upon us, to praise God by caring for this dwelling place he created for us and for all the creatures with which we share the planet; to model for our children good behaviors by tempering our buying habits and propensity for waste. Let us always remember how blessed we are to dwell in God's house, and let gratitude for that blessing guide how we care for our precious Earth.

Living the Word...

New Year's resolutions, anyone? How about to care for ourselves (God's lovely dwelling places, as well) and to care for Mother Earth. Commit to finding a way each day to spend a few minutes outside, not just rushing off to the next thing, but looking around, taking in the vista, even if it is a dark and dreary day. Exercise outside is even better, but take time to at least notice the flowers! And resolve to develop new habits, small changes that help the environment: reduce your energy consumption by turning off seldom-used electronics; cut down on the use of plastics, particularly plastic bags; plan meals to reduce food waste. Have the kids or grandkids take the lead by researching changes the family can make. "And be thankful." (Col 3:15). An attitude of gratitude can make a world of difference and enhance our awareness of God's gifts.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Dec 31: *“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth.”* (Jn 1:1-18)

The Greek translation of “made his dwelling among us” is “he pitched his tent among us.” How endearing! It harkens back to the tent of the Ark of the Covenant in which God dwells and travels with the Israelites in the desert. It is God’s preferred place to be with the people as they journey to the Promised Land (Ex 7:6-7). Jesus too wants to dwell with us in the comings and goings amid our ordinary days. Are you aware of Jesus’ presence in your life? Is his tent somewhere on the outskirts or is it a place you just visit on the Sabbath? Invite Jesus to move closer, to pitch his tent right alongside yours. Consider asking him to make his home with you.

Jan 1: *“So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation. May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity; the nations on the earth you guide. May the peoples praise you, O God.”* (Ps 67)

Let us pray this psalm verse together on this first day of the New Year. The nations on earth are truly in dire need of God’s guidance and mercy; our prayer is that God’s way will be known upon the earth and his salvation granted to all, especially those who suffer injustice, spiritual and material poverty, sickness in body, mind, or spirit. Prayer is particularly important if, like me, you are feeling disempowered and unable to affect change. It is precisely when we feel hopeless that prayer becomes an anchor and our source of hope. Let us make a commitment to one another as we begin 2019 to be a force for change, through our voices, our actions, AND our prayers. A Happy and Blessed New Year to you all!

Jan 2: *“Beloved: Who is a liar? ...Whoever denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist.”* (1 Jn 2:22-28)

The term “The Antichrist” makes for frightening headlines, but the term is used in Scripture only by the author of John’s letters. It has evolved as more a legend, the “beast” of Revelations, the evil one who will rule the world before the last days. The actual meaning of the term as used in these letters is clearly less dramatic: “an imposter or usurper of someone else’s role.” (David Bentley-Hart) It makes me reflect: do I always act in a way that represents Christ to the other, or am I sometimes an imposter? Do I at times deny Jesus by my lack of awareness? No, my sinful nature does not make me an antichrist, but this passage does remind me how important it is to really walk the walk. The only way to defeat real evil is with real love and goodness.

Jan 3: *“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 Jn 2:29-3:6)

I want to say to the author, “But we do know. We have seen him as he is. Our destiny as God’s children has been revealed in the person of Jesus. Our goal is to be like him. Yes, we are God’s children and our earthly task is to model our lives after his. We pray for the grace to follow Jesus’ example of compassion and love to all we meet, of being willing to stand up for justice and righteousness in the face of hypocrisy and lies. It has been revealed--in the face of the man from Galilee. Let us look to him for courage and strength to live as he lived.

Jan 4: *Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah,” which is translated Christ.* (Jn 1:35-42)

Think about the statement Andrew makes to Simon: “We have found the Messiah.” That’s a pretty bold claim to make. Now we know Andrew has been one of John the Baptist’s disciples and that John gives Andrew and his companion a head’s up by pointing out “The Lamb of God.” But it’s obvious in this passage, Jesus has a profound effect on people. Does Jesus have a profound effect on you? If not, perhaps you really haven’t yet found the Messiah. Spend time reading his words in the Gospels. Do they speak of salvation to you?

Jan 5: *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him.” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?”* (Jn 1:43-51)

Nathanael has just dissed Jesus’ hometown: “can anything good come from Nazareth?” Yet Jesus sees Nathanael’s honesty as a quality (although some scholars suggest this could be a tongue-in-cheek joke on the Jesus’ part, as Israel—Jacob—was quite duplicitous!) Put yourself in Nathanael’s sandals: you’ve been invited by a friend to meet this man, Jesus. Perhaps you’re skeptical as well. Jesus sees you approaching. What might he say about you? What qualities does he recognize? You ask him, “How do you know me?” Have a dialogue with Jesus about what he sees in and knows about you. What can you learn about him?