

ADVENT REFLECTION 2020

Week 2: Building the Kingdom of God

*He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms.*

Isaiah 40:10

*We are waiting for the new heavens and new earth, where
righteousness will be at home.*

2 Peter 3:13

FAITH INTO ACTION

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd may at first seem gentle and idyllic but a shepherd in those times had to be fearless and constantly watchful to protect his flock from predators. In the face of attack only his courage would save them from danger and destruction. A shepherd's life was solitary and lonely yet he remained committed to safe-guarding his flock. Going against the crowd for the sake of justice and peace can also be lonely and requires courage and steadfastness.

Inspired by this week's readings, may we too be fearless, speaking out against injustice as we seek to build the Kingdom of God, regardless of the cost to ourselves. Our Advent preparation inspires us to work for change to make the new heaven and new earth become a reality for all peoples where everyone is cared for and valued.

This year's Advent reflections are taken from the writings of our daughter Annie, a scripture scholar, evangelist and teacher, who died of natural causes in June. In October 2012 she wrote: "We are called as the people of God to serve the communities in whose lives we share and to be people of vision... Our mission to serve cannot be restricted in terms of nationality, social group, religious affiliation, etc.

...The letter of St. James teaches that genuine faith must be expressed in action."

THE MOVEMENT OF GOD

In article from June 2017 Annie wrote: "I'd just walked up a great big hill in North Wales, and as I paused to admire the view, it struck me that such beautiful views come only after a steep climb, and, indeed, come only because of movement. It would have been easier not to move that day – I was four days into a 134-mile sponsored walk and I was a bit tired and achy. Sitting still and doing nothing seemed quite appealing. But not going uphill, not moving, would have meant not reaching my destination and not experiencing the beauty waiting there for me. So, I kept moving.

And, as I walked that day, I began to think about movement. What does it mean to move? I thought about other words and ideas that describe some aspect of this word *movement* – words and ideas like: motion, life, activity, energy, change, openness, improvement, growth, wondering, wandering, transformation, rhythm, flexibility.

I thought about the things in my backpack that I didn't really need for the journey that were weighing me down and restricting my movement. I thought about things in my life that need to move. I thought about things in my heart that need to move. I thought about things in our country and in our world that need to move.

...I'm reminded of something I used to teach my Philosophy students – that God is the Prime Mover, that all movement can be traced back to God because without an initial mover, nothing would move at all. Without God, there is no life, no movement, no change.

I thought about Jesus as the movement of God, the stepping out of God, the motion and activity of God, the changing and transforming arrival of God – in my life, in my heart, in our country and in our world. Then I thought about how I need to be the movement of God, how we, as Church, need to be the movement of God...

...What needs to move in your life?

Where and how can you be the movement of God?"

Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced. Psalm 84:10