

ADVENT WEEK TWO

December 8, 2019

Anticipation

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse... Isaiah 11:1

As I write this reflection, it is the first of August and, thus, the time of anticipation—of advent—for the fall semester and the coming of new students to campus for orientation. It is a focused and exciting time for faculty and staff preparing to welcome and engage students in the good work of teaching and learning, of centering and reaching out, of seeking hopeful grounds for justice in which the metaphors of lions and lambs resting together, of bears and cows grazing alongside one another (Is 11:6-7) take human flesh across diversities of race, gender identities, and faith commitments. And it is a focused time for students as well, new students especially, looking forward to the friends they hope to make but perhaps also wondering if they are prepared for the studies they'll encounter.

In the life of faith neither Advent nor Christmas are set by the calendar. We celebrate these seasons in the life of the church as a way of practicing openness, hospitality, and gift-giving so that we might come to live these practices in every season of our lives. And so, the coming of these students to us is a radical gift of God. Anticipation—advent—always includes aspects of agitation, anxiety, and uncertainty, as well as of joy and hope that break open our embedded theologies and conventional assumptions. The opening verse from our text in Isaiah underscores the vulnerability of Advent as well as its utterly unexpected character: "A shoot shall come up from the stump of Jesse."

Deep learning always involves the risk of holding ourselves open to both others and to insights we've not known—and that might endanger us. The peace of advent is not the stillness of the same, or the stillness of the dead stump. The peace of advent comes in the affirmation of new life, in the difficult gift of being reborn, opening ourselves to unforeseen and unimaginable encounters that will remake us and teach us again what it means to be incarnate and to touch the sacredness that we call God.

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