

Second Sunday of Advent 2017

“Comfort, give comfort to my people. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock, in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom.”

(Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11)

“Advent is about being calmed into a quietness that heals and listens and molds us into a more holy and human shape”

Last week looked at how we as a church are being moved from having faith **"IN"** Jesus towards having the faith **"OF"** Jesus. Brian McLaren in his book, "The Great Spiritual Migration," writes: *"When our Christian faith shifts from teaching correct beliefs to practicing the way of love as Jesus taught, then our whole understanding and experience of the church, the world and ourselves will be transformed into a school of love."*

What does loving the way Jesus loved look like? To paraphrase Isaiah: *“By comforting, giving comfort to all people. Like a shepherd feeding his flock, in our arms we are to gather the lambs, carrying them in our bosom.”* When we do this, we are calmed into a quietness that heals and listens and molds us into a more holy and human shape

What happens to us when we haven't been comforted and embraced, and not calmed into a quietness that heals and molds one into a more holy and human shape. Jimmy was a former gang member I met in L.A. about 20 years ago who at the time was a senior executive at the gang intervention program called Homeboy Industries in L.A. He said in his early life he knew what it is like not to be comforted, to be hungry and not be fed or be carried in another's arms. He was never permitted as a boy to cry his pain. He describes his story in what he calls, *"Crying Poem"*:

Jimmy's Story

"For the longest time, I haven't been able to cry. Tears start to come while I am watching a movie, tears start to come, swelling my whole body, a tulip starting to open under the moon. Then the petals of my eyelids stiffen and something in me braces and I don't cry.

"When we crashed into a telephone pole, my dad yelled at me not to cry. I was terrified, almost killed – but don't cry, he said. I couldn't cry because men don't cry. When the dog bit me on the leg, I couldn't cry. When Joey died, I couldn't cry. How cool it would feel to have a tear slide down the corner of my eye on my cheek, to the curve of my lip, where I could taste it - but don't cry. Something blocks the paths, channels under my skin. Tear ducts are red cracked clay, dried-died days. Here I come, flooding prison walls, my children's bedrooms, splashing and tears slinging tears up to my ankles.

Goodbyes were crying events – goodbye to grandma, to my brother, friends, my neighborhood, teachers and other boys, and I never shed a tear, though I felt them coming up in me. I bit my teeth down hard to hold the tears back, lowered my face and thought about something else. I keep hearing voices in me, telling me not to cry, don't cry, don't cry!

I was eight when I got a beating for crying. My heart seething for tears to cool it down, but coal-shoveling man keep feeding it – don't cry, don't cry, don't cry. . . Man, I cry, and it's a lie that I don't. I embrace my brother and pray shoulder to shoulder. I kneel and kiss earth, and I cry – if only I could cry. I want to sob autumn tears on my window, streaking the pane blurring the world. I want to fill every hole in my heart with glimmering tear pools, fill my kitchen sink with tears, just thinking of me not crying all of these years makes me want to cry, but I have been taught not to cry – big people don't cry, people say, ain't those alligator tears boy, can't fool me with those tears.

"I'm going to cry until my shirt is drenched, and my hands shimmering wet with tears running down my face on my arms, my legs and breast, and you have to look at me, because I am drowning your manly ways in my tears, to get back my tears. I am crying until there isn't a single tear left, crying for what we've been through not crying. We need to weep – get up in the middle of the night, and cry, like stomach convulsing childbirth, we need to give birth to that terrible convulsion of tears, weep for those we never wept for, let the legs shake in your arms, embrace you in the junkie habit of tears, weep for the poor in prison taken from their families, the fieldworker's daughter eaten by cancer from pesticides, and weep for all those homeless who couldn't meet mortgage payments, those sleeping under bridges, and the hopeless, cry out differences into a lake, where we can all cleanse our goodbyes and apathy, papas cry for their children. Let children cry in my arms, men cry in my arms, endurance cry in my arms. Let us all cry, after lovemaking and fighting, crying out loud, louder, cry, baby, cry! Cry! Cry!"

Jimmy knows what it means not to be comforted,
to be fed when he was hungry, to be held in the bosom of another, to hear:

“Comfort, give comfort to my people. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock, in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom.”

Advent is the promise of being comforted and fed, gathered together and carried in another's bosom - not just by the Shepherd - but by each of us. This is the hope of Advent; this is the work of Advent: *"to calm us into a quietness that heals and listens and molds us into a more holy and human shape."*

It is indeed good to say Happy Advent - to everyone!