

*Based on Psalm 25. The Compassionate One Companions Us*

If you were paying very close attention last Sunday during our first ever hybrid Congregational Meeting, you would have seen a miracle in our midst: the blind were brought to sight, right before our eyes.

It turns out the chairperson of our congregation's Nominating Committee this year, Richard Womeldorf, just so happens to be legally blind. But that did not stop him from delivering the report of the Nominating Committee as the featured moment for our meeting. Fifteen minutes before we went live, Richard rolled his wheelchair into place in the sanctuary and calmly assured us he was fully prepared to present every single nomination word for word by himself.

Yours truly was a skeptic. How could Richard possibly have memorized all those names and the exact order of presentation and all of the bells and whistles that go along with this particular congregational rite of passage? I confess, to my shame, I did not entirely trust he could do it.

Lo and behold, as the meeting turned to his report, Richard held forth with great gusto. After doing a quick double-take, I came to see his beloved wife, Suzanne, leaning forward in the pew right beside him, with a hushed whisper, feeding Richard his lines, one by one, in a grace-filled symbiosis that was beautiful to behold. It turns out I was the one who needed to see. This is what Love – with a capital L – looks like. A partnership of the purest form, bound together for better and for worse, in sickness and in health, united in body and spirit with a mission of aligning the past and the future with the present, through the power-packed report of the SPC Nominating Committee. Especially on the Reign of Love Sunday, we could not have asked for anything more.

And yet more came.

As I spoke with Richard and Suzanne once the meeting had concluded and remarked on the partnership they had presented to the congregation, Richard replied, "There came a point, in the midst of everything that was going wrong in my life, with my body falling apart and my sight fading, that I had to make the most important decision there is: "I had to make the decision not to be alone."

And there you have it.

On this First Sunday of Advent, as the pandemic we all *really* hoped this time might be fading is in fact steadily mutating, as yet another mass shooting barely makes headlines, as we lament one racially charged jury verdict and affirm a second, we get to make – one more time – the most important decision there is: as our body politic is falling apart and our collective sight is failing, we get to decide not to be alone.

That is, after all, what Christmas claims to be about: that we are not alone. Somehow, some way, even with all of our fits and starts, even with all of our opening up and closing back down, even in spite of all evidence to the contrary, Christmas claims *Immanuel*: God is still with us. We are not ever alone. We are "companied," as the psalmist says, every day, along our way.

From the beginning of time this companionship has been with us. Not in some static, stoic, self-aggrandizing form. But with *compassion*. Which comes from the Latin: *com passio*. Which means *to feel with*. Or *to suffer with*. Which means The One Who Companions Us, from the beginning of time, through our fits and starts, and

our opening up and closing back down, through our falling apart and losing our vision, far from being stuck up with the pie in the sky by and by, is instead intimately acquainted with this roller coaster ride of multiple pandemics. “Feeling all the feels,” as they say, right along with us.

Not only that. The One Who Companions Us, from the beginning of time, through our fits and starts, and our opening up and closing back down, through all of the multiple pandemics piling on top of us, The One Who Companions Us is *merciful*. Which, in the biblical Hebrew, comes from the same root as the word for *womb*. Which means The One Who Companions Us still carries all of creation in the divine womb, birthing us always into a *new* creation, putting our collective broken body back together again and restoring our collective sight.

We are not *ever* alone, Christmas claims. It is, in fact, *not physically possible* to be alone. We are, instead, all cuddled up in the amniotic fluid of the divine womb, fed by the divine placenta, curled up forever in the fetal position, sucking our thumb and calling it good! That is what Christmas claims to be about.

And yet there is this birthing. Which sounds beautiful in theory but is quite laborious in practice. And, again, is best not endured alone.

We, who enter this particular season of Advent, Two Thousand Twenty One, with our particular ongoing pandemics, even as we rightfully curl up in the fetal position and suck our thumb in seductive escape, also find ourselves in the role of Mother Mary: the One Giving Birth to Divine Hope.

*Theotokos*, Mary is called in the Greek: God-Bearer. God-With-Skin-On, we might also say. The one whose treasuring and savoring and gestating of Hope-Made-Flesh ends up bringing joy to the entire world.

It sounds daunting at first, but the truth is, Mary can do what she does because she, too, chooses not to be alone. She stays with her husband, even though he is not the biological father of her child. She clings to her cousin, who is older and wiser in many ways, but just as new to this whole Birthing Hope thing as Mary is. She throws herself upon the mercy of the animals when there is no room for her anywhere else. And she shares her Hope with others – including outsiders – all along the way.

This, in the end, is the true miracle of Christmas. This Birthing Hope, over and over again, in one another and through one another. This symbiotic solidarity of commitment, this feeding one another our lines when we can no longer see them for ourselves. This partnership of the purest form, bound together for better and for worse, in sickness and in health, united in body and spirit with a mission of aligning the past and the future with the present.

This, in the end is the true miracle of Christmas. All we have to do is make the most important decision there is: when everything is falling apart all around us and within us, we have to decide *not* to be alone.

Let the church say, Amen!