

December 5, 2020

Dear Church,

The year I turned 23 I was really lucky to be hired for an off season position at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp. Some of you probably know this peaceful place in the Sangre De Cristos mountain range in southern Colorado. I got to live on site for nine months and serve as a retreat host, a billing specialist, a custodian and sometimes even a plumber. It was my first introduction to really rural life, where a round trip to the grocery store was nearly two hours.

My favorite moments at camp were when it would snow. I would put on my big boots and my puffy winter coat and go out for a walk. And sometimes I would just stand still, watching the snow come down on the surrounding forest. It is the most beautiful silence in the world.

I think that in many ways that silence is the sound of Advent. It is the sound of longing and yearning and anticipation; it is the sound of those who watch, and wait, and listen; that silence is the sound of hope. This season that silence may feel a little more ominous or mournful than usual. We are accustomed to the sounds of the hustle and bustle of Christmas. I know that I will be missing the business of a house full of company, the laughter and conversation of everyone crowded into the kitchen to do our Christmas baking together, the little coos of my nieces as they experience the magic of this season. The pandemic we are living through has changed so much and our observation of Christmas will be no exception. It'll be a quieter one this year. But perhaps this is an opportunity...

Can we take the silence of this Advent as an invitation to listen more deeply to God? A chance to listen more deeply to ourselves and discern the longing of our own hearts? A moment to settle into the comfort of our homes and routines and to discover that peace is not something that we have to go searching for, but rather that it is our constant companion, if only we can quiet ourselves enough to embrace it? Beautiful things happen in silence, as theologian Howard Thurman noted. He writes, "In the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair."

God be with you, bless you and keep you in these silent nights.

Peace be with you,

-Pastor Emily