

Sermon for Third Sunday of Advent – Year A  
December 15, 2019 – Church of Reconciliation  
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes

***A Cosmic Map, A Holy Highway: A Destination of Love and Peace***

One of my favorite contemporary spiritual writers is Jan Richardson. If you have ever attended a Tuesday celebration of Holy Eucharist, you may be more familiar with her as I often use her blessing prayers as sources of inspiration and reflection. She is ordained in the United Methodist Church and is a renown retreat leader, author, and source of spiritual wisdom for spiritual seekers and pilgrims.

In one of her books, titled, *Night Visions: searching the shadows of advent and christmas*, she has a reflection on maps. I was drawn to this particular reading since like Jan, I love maps, old, even ancient kinds of maps, and also like her, I never read a map very well. Thank goodness for mapquest and now navigation systems to help the truly spatially disabled like myself successfully travel from one place to another.

Jan writes this:

*I love maps. ... I love to look at maps, especially the really old ones who understood mapmaking as an art. The ones made before all the corners of the earth had been charted, and adventurous souls approaching the boundaries of the known world were warned by the cartographer's hand, "Beyond here be dragons." ... It is a heartening thought that if we study a piece of paper long enough, it will show us the way to our destination. ... I also think, though that we come into the world with a scrap, a shred of some cosmic map in our grasp. It's lined onto the palms of our hands that emerged with us, fisted, from our mother's ocean. There are days when I believe that if we touch enough hands, place them side by side, we'll finally see the map. Across the landscape of our palms, across the terrain of our hands that come in different sizes and colors and have wrinkles or scars and are smooth or leathery with work and are missing fingers or are twisted with illness, across their flesh lie the lines that if we look closely enough are connected and will guide us, protect us, and take us safely to our destination.*

My friends, please open-up your hands, turn them over and look at the palms of your hands. The lines that if you take Jan's words to heart, may indeed contain glimpses of a cosmic map that will guide us safely to our destination... always to the very heart of God. I love this interpretation and I am deeply grateful for the cosmic possibility that such a map truly exists when we align all our human hands together to find that there is only one home made by the very work of our Creator; and this one destination, the very heart of God, can only be found in aligning the landscape of our palms across the vast expanse of humanity.

Today is the third Sunday of Advent and the great prophet Isaiah offers us yet another glimpse of the landscape of the universe totally transformed by the glory of God.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the dessert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing...*

All Creation, herself, reveals the glory of the Divine and sings out with joy! Surely all God's creatures would sing along in the chorus of praise that echoes through the universe. But the glory of God is not limited to the transformation of the landscape of the universe. The glory of God extends to the transformation of humanity's own aches and pains:

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*

Nothing, nothing, and no one, not one human being is excluded from this vision of healing, holiness, and peace. Surely this is a message you and I need to hear today: to glimpse a world totally transformed by the mercy and grace of the Creator. These days when there is far too much violence and death. When we see in these days when even the earth is groaning and heaving, as if convulsing in excruciating pain that Creation herself is calling out for healing. Into our lives, into the wounds of our own aches and pain, Isaiah pours the balm of healing, calling us to become the Reconcilers and Healers we are each created to be.

In the next three verses of the text before us today, Isaiah gives us the map.

*A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
... it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools shall go astray...  
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Friends, turn over your hands once again... what if there is a cosmic map that when we extend our hands to one another and connect with joy and song, we find our way home, to the destination that is our true home, the Holy Way leading to the very heart of God, wherein everyone dwells in peace?

If you and I live with fisted hands, ready to throw the next punch of anger or frustration or judgment at whoever becomes our next target, we will never connect the lines of the holiest map of all leading us home to Love.

At the conclusion of her reflection on *Maps*, Jan Richardson writes her blessing prayer:

*At the edges of our borders, you wait,  
and at our territorial lines, you linger.*

*Because the place where we touch, beyond our boundaries  
is where you take your delight.*

*And when we learn to read the landscape of our fears,  
and when we come to know the terrain of every sorrow,*

*then will we turn our fences into bridges,  
and our borders into paths of peace.*

On this third Sunday of Advent, may you treat with tenderness and compassion the work of the Creator's hand in all Creation. May you see in your own hand, the handwriting and sketching of the Creator, messaging us in love and inextricably connecting us one to another. And then may you extend your hands to others as Healers and Reconcilers, brothers and sisters in this Divine dance of Love and the making of Peace, travelers on the Holy Way.

Amen.