

sermon Christmas 2013
'Let me Rest'

Katie De Veau has a wonderful song called, 'Let me Rest'

It begins:

How did I get here?

I have been here before,

with the smokey haze of emotion that comes

knocking at my door

Cliches and excuses just pour

salt upon the wounded

You see I'm tired of tired, tired of here,

tired of trying just to be

let me rest

let me rest

in your love again.

I don't know about you, but I resonate with this, I'm tired. Tired, and excited because it's Christmas.

It is Christmas, so now we can rest, deep inside, because we remember again, what we may sometimes forget, that God is with us, Emmanuel, God in the flesh, the God who knows, who understands who gets it, from our human perspective.

On this day of celebration, family and relationship stress, end of year tiredness, we remember that God is with us so we can breathe, we can rest, as the newborn child did in his mother's arms, we can rest. You are here, for whatever reasons, held in the loving arms of God and this community.

This rest doesn't necessarily mean stopping what we are doing. It is something about a peace at the ground of our being, a something more, deep within, and beyond, a sense of awe, of wonder.. That is why we allow silence in this service, for you to rest, and notice what is happening inside, and around.

At the Taize Service a few weeks ago, I found myself rocking baby Amelia to sleep on my chest.

I rocked back back and forwards, back and forwards, as you do when you are rocking a baby,

feeling her weight ,

sensing her breath, hearing the gentle snuffling sound of sleep.

She relaxed, resting soundly in my arms.

According to Luke, 'Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger.'

We see such tenderness,
and now she rests, after the exhausting work and anxiety of giving birth. She is enfolded in the love of something larger, something beyond.

Sure, there are things to be done.
places to go, people to see, lunch to cook, presents to unwrap,
but just for a moment,
let us rest too,
before this miracle of life.

Look, he sighs in his sleep.
safe, enfolded, cradled.
This is not just any life, here is the presence of 'God with us' Emmanuel,
flesh and blood symbol of God's unconditional love.

We can let go of fear, for we recognize in this sleeping, vulnerable child, a truth, which is mystery, in a particular baby, a particular time..

We see the baby, swaddled in cloth. We watch him sleep, hear his cries, the lowing of cattle, and the baaing of sheep. We smell the warm hay and know the new born, messy and moist with blood and water, very human.
We touch his cheek, curl his tiny fingers around ours, count his toes.
Then, we stand back in silence, in awe, and rest,
because God is with us now, as God has always been.

Loader (adapted)

The focus of the Christmas story, of course, is not the shepherds, nor even the angels. It is this new-born child. But the shepherds and the angels are part of the story and do tell us something of who Jesus is. Shepherds were sometimes a despised group. They represent ordinary people, not those given great status or deserving special privilege in the human community. They are poor people. To such as these Jesus came.

The angels' presence is as though there is a veil separating the world of heaven and the earthly world; for a moment the veil is withdrawn. The shepherds on earth are caught up into the activities of heaven. They participate in the heavenly choir of praise. This is a powerful symbol which signals that in Jesus we find ourselves encountered by God. The vertical and

horizontal meet in Jesus. The deep divine secret of life breaks through. We are addressed in him with the Word of God Godself. We are addressed in our ordinariness without our deserving and are drawn into God's activity.

This is mystery. 'Mystery does not require action; Mystery requires our attention. Mystery requires that we listen and become open. When we meet with the unknown in this way, we can be touched by a wisdom that can transform our lives'. p337 'My Grandfather's Blessing, Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging' Rachel Naomi Remen

Eternity breaks into time, at this particular time. This is something which is new, yet reveals the way things have already, always been. Preexistent, Christ, always was and always will be. We are drawn into this mystery, this mystery which is transforming us in ways we can't get our head around. We connect with this Christmas story by reconnecting with ourselves, with mystery.(Sarah Bachelard)

Tiredness is held at bay as we sink into this moment.

John Main writes, 'If we have the courage to enter into silence, in the silence we learn what it means to be.' (John Main, Door to Silence)

God is with us in the messy business of being human, in the fragility and vulnerability, the strength and resilience that is our life, God is with us. In Jesus birth, life, death, resurrection, God is with us.. so we can breathe. we can rest. be still. trust.

As Luke has told it, the scene contrasts powerlessness and deprivation with powerful rulers. Here is a new powerless power. Here is a new foolish wisdom. Here is God. (Loader) Think about that a moment..

William Loader reflects:

'The Christmas Story never really ends. Analyses and explanations end... But the power of the story is its creativity. It opens itself to us and opens us to ourselves and to our world. It is a rejoicing that invites us to joy. And it is a murmuring of pain and crying. It enlarges birth itself and somehow also creates new life in us if we allow the meeting to take place. My reflections are part of my meeting, born from my meeting with the story. I share them for the joy of their retelling,'

wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/Christmas7.htm

Let us pray:

May my soul be rested, Lord, this Christmas -
not in flight from your amazing world,
but because I would still like to have energy
to struggle for justice,
to tell others about you,
to share what I have,
to laugh and to love,
and not be totally burnt out!

Let me rest.

Amen.

adapted from Peter Millar in
Candles and Conifers p189-191 Ruth Burgess

Katie De Veau sings: 'Let me rest'..... from her album Simple Life

Susanna Pain
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