



Slowing Down for Justice

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While I was pregnant with our second child, our local church held an Advent Fair where we all made Advent wreaths out of cardstock, paper greens, and small candles.

We took ours home and I reverently placed it on our dining room table. “Let’s try something,” I said to my spouse.

“Let’s use it for grace every night during Advent. Each week, we’ll say a prayer for hope, peace, love, or joy. I know our three-year old will probably say something about hoping for a fire truck, but that’s ok. Let’s give it a go.”

At the time, my brother-in-law was going through treatment for brain cancer. Our three-year-old knew he was sick.

The first night, we lit the first candle, each saying what we hoped for. Out of our young child’s mouth came, “I hope Uncle Brian gets better.”

This practice of how we said grace each Advent became such a tradition that years later, when our younger child served in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, he brought the practice to his chosen community that year.

We still get out that old Advent wreath, spruce it up with cedar branches and greens from our yard, replace the candles, and pause each night to consider what we hope for, where we want peace, what we feel joy about, and what we love.

When Rosalyn Carter passed away recently, we lost a quiet and consistent hope-bearer in our country. I believe it’s important we not underestimate the power of quiet and consistent hope. In order for us to create any justice in the world, we must consistently make space for hope.

This year, as I contemplate the state of the world, I'll admit it is difficult to feel hope. Destruction rages in the Middle East, war continues in Ukraine, and deadly conflict, famine, and injustice reign in places that don't make news headlines. There is an abundance of ignorance, finger pointing, Christian nationalism, white supremacy, climate destruction, and an epidemic of loneliness. There is illness in our bodies and minds and even in our very souls.

Hope is not passive; it is an action, or repeated actions. Continuing to hope in the midst of relentless injustice is an act of profound resistance. When we intentionally slow down, breathe, reflect, and hope, we radically counter that which empire strives to create. Instead of working ourselves to exhaustion, we reclaim our belovedness, if only for a moment at a time.

However you choose to acknowledge Advent this year, my hope for you is that it includes slowing down. I hope you are able to connect with the spirit deep within you that is more than your body or your racing thoughts or your tumultuous emotions. Though seemingly counterintuitive, it's actually an effective way to embody a practice of dismantling systems of oppression and violence and supremacy.

So this Advent, if you're looking for me, I'll be sitting around a beloved Advent wreath, taking deep breaths and resisting empire, one prayer at a time.

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