

More Than Muddling Through

JourneyMates Community Reflection

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It's a good thing I love Christmas music because, in some stores, I think it started playing sometime mid-October. Certainly since Thanksgiving, it's been on around the clock on the radio. As I have listened to those familiar and beloved carols, I have noticed the longings that surface. You can certainly hear it in our Christian carols, but also in many of our favorite secular carols:

“Have yourself a merry little Christmas. Let your heart be light. From now on our troubles will be out of sight. . . .”

This was originally recorded by Judy Garland during World War II when the world was a mess and Hitler had control. In that version, it goes on to say:

“Through the years we all will be together, if the fates allow. Until then we'll have to muddle through somehow.”

As I thought about it, this song is all about the deep longing of wanting things to be right, to be as God intended it to be. But, how sad to think we have to “muddle through somehow”.

Enuma Okoro in her advent devotional *Silence and Other Surprising Invitations of Advent* says this:

Like those who witnessed the first coming of Christ, we hear God beckon us during Advent to make ourselves available to God in new and courageous ways. Advent is a season to ponder, to listen, to understand that prayer is as much about cultivating stillness and attentiveness as it is about offering our words to God. As we anticipate God made flesh in Christ Jesus, we dare to relinquish control, to harness our empty life-

numbing habits and forfeit logic because God often acts outside of such boundaries. Advent is a season in which we are reminded that God invites us to listen, dwell, wait and trust. . . .

Several years ago, as much as I hate to admit it, I felt as if Christmas was a never-ending box on my to-do list I needed to check. Sitting in church during the Christmas Eve service, I realized I had walked through the entire Advent season numb and deadened to all God had for me. I had simply “muddled through somehow”.

This season that we are now in is legitimately very busy, and for many, it does bring to the surface unmet longings that can be really difficult and really painful. So how as JourneyMates, on this road of journey-ing with God and one another, do we walk *into* all God has for us rather than with the sense of “muddling through somehow”; *How do we live into the notion that the Incarnated Jesus has been and is born within us?*

One of our core values in JourneyMates is *to pay attention; to notice*.

When we are present and aware, taking the time to paying attention to the moment. . . we notice.

We notice what’s going on around us, and inside of us.

When we notice those things, we feel; emotions are evoked and come to the surface.

When we feel and pay attention to those emotions, God reveals our deepest longings.

And those longings are an invitation to draw near to the heart of God.

As a prayerful exercise at some point during the Advent season, sit in the presence of Jesus, taking time to *pay attention. . . to notice*. As you pay attention, with no hurry or pressure, put *a word* to what you have noticed.

Continue to sit in the presence of Christ, and if you are able, **name the feeling or emotion that is behind that word.** Continuing to sit and hold all that is within before the Lord, ask God to reveal the **longing that is behind the feeling.**

Our longings and desires are Holy and beautiful.

Jim Branch [this Jim Branch lives in Tennessee] says this in his *Advent Devotional*:

Ultimately, the season of Advent is a season of groaning; the groaning of our hearts and the groaning of our God. It is the groaning that comes from a deep longing for all to be as it was intended...God meets us in a beautifully mysterious way. He meets us in a way that couldn't be met otherwise – making this groan both a trust-filled embracing of where he has us as well as a deep yearning for so much more – for deliverance and restoration; healing and wholeness.

As we celebrate and acknowledge Christ's first Incarnation this Advent season, we realize and recognize here we are 2000 years later, still waiting, still longing for Jesus to come as the Ultimate Incarnation. God has woven an incredible story throughout history of His coming. From the very beginning, He's always promised to dwell among us.

In Exodus, God said to Abraham, "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." In John 1, He says: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." And, In Revelation, John says: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he will live with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. . ."

The Incarnated Jesus is at the core of every longing we have.

The gift of hindsight can be a beautiful thing, can't it? As I have thought about that Christmas a couple of years ago when that Christmas season felt so busy, so meaningless, so devoid of any connection to God, I realized it was never my intent or desire to walk through that Christmas season feeling empty. But

sometimes, we have no control over what is stirring within us, **but there is room to notice, to pay attention and to bring that before God.** I wonder if I had paid attention to those feelings of numbness and busyness, what longings I would have noticed and what gift I would have been able to then receive? I say that now, without condemnation, but with curiosity and a desire to pay attention.

On tiptoe we stand, Lord Jesus
Eagerly awaiting
Your full revelation
Always expecting you
To come some more.

Our hands and hearts
Are open to your grace.
Our lives still waiting for
The fullness of your presence.
We are those who have been promised
A kingdom, and we can never forget
Yet we have a foot in both worlds
And so we stumble.

But we still stand on tiptoe
Owning our kingdom-loving hearts
And our earth-eyes
We lean forward
And hope.
~Marcrina Wiederkehr

Perhaps the one shift we make this season is to notice....without pressure or condemnation....to notice and pay attention to what is happening in us. Simply holding it out to God. Holding it out with an openness and wonder of how He is incarnated in that reality with us.