

When Philip and I still lived in California and we were in our early 20s, we really enjoyed camping. We had three children at that point and Philip and I decided we should all go camping. The kids were 1, 3 and 4 years old. Did I say that I was in my early 20s? You can do anything at that age, right? So, we packed up the van and headed to the mountains to set up our tent and our campsite.

My mother *never* was a nature lover in any way and so I had never been camping when I was a child. When she and I went on vacation it was to large cities with lots of museums and shopping and theater.

So, camping was a really foreign experience for me as a young adult. But I loved it. I have branded onto my memory forever a particular morning when I woke up early, before sunrise, and couldn't get back to sleep. After quietly putting on my coat and boots, I crawled out of the tent into the early morning chill. There was only the light of the near full moon at that hour and I could see a tiny bit of smoke still coming up from the mostly cold campfire from last night. That moon, though, which was high in the night sky, cast a quiet glow over the whole scene. The shadows of the redwood trees were long and dark on the forest floor.

I started to gather some fallen wood by that moonlight and soon I had a little blaze going. When I looked up from my work, I couldn't see the moon any longer because the eastern horizon was glowing and pink. And between the new little fire and the brighter sky I felt warmer and very hopeful.

I sat on my camp stool warming my hands and waited. It was so quiet, except for the little crackles of the fire. The world smelled like evergreens and smoke and dirt. It was enchanting.

Second Candle of Advent this year I named the moon candle. For those of you who weren't here last Sunday I took the names from the Gospel reading for Advent 1. **“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth.”** (Luke 21:25) As we move through Advent, we'll move through these heavenly bodies, and today it's the moon candle.

I don't think you can be human and not be amazed at the beauty and delicacy of a new crescent moon, or entranced by a full moon rising in the East. And even though the moon shines on us with just reflected light from the sun, how it can light up a nighttime scene when you're in a place free of man-made light.

And as much as we love beauty and peace and want to cultivate these things at this time of the year, we also need to keep our eyes on reality for people here at home and far away. People are suffering around the globe and in our own communities.

In the Biblical world that we hear about in our readings today, the people of Jerusalem had been rounded up, sent into exile in a foreign land while their homes and their livelihood had been taken over by the invading Babylonians. When we speak of the “Babylonian Exile” it term seems pretty

scholarly and bloodless. But the Hebrews from long ago were real people involved in a terrible war which they lost and they were taken captive.

Injustices just like this happen on a large scale and a small scale all the time in our own world. The Afghan people have been batted about; ruled by one people and then another and then back again. Each ruling body has a very different set of rules for the people. A girl can't go to school, then she can for a while, and then the Taliban comes back in and makes that a challenge again. Meanwhile, the people are starving and the aid we used to send to the country has been cut off.

Here in the United States things are certainly not so dire, but there are people who are oppressed and not able to live free of discrimination right here. I heard a story just yesterday of a person who was placed in a nursing facility that was underfunded, understaffed and part of a very stressful system. This person was ignored his bed and unfortunately fell out. If he didn't have noisy advocates, he would still be suffering there and not attended to properly.

The suffering happens to the nurses and care givers too because they are not supported and staffing is difficult in this continuing pandemic. But that in turn leads to patients that are not supported. Everyone has human limits of care and empathy. And, it becomes, as usual, a matter of who can afford a certain level of care. And who has the ability to fight for their rights to that care.

People experience a lack of respect, a lack of care, and discrimination of all sorts in every community. We have to be people of faith and people of conscience who listen, empathize and act in whatever way we can.

Both the prophecy of Baruch, and the quote from Luke's Gospel that reminds us of the words of the prophet Isaiah speak of God bringing us home and setting things right. God, in the prophets' vision makes the way a highway, broad and flat, to bring the people back home after the Babylonian Captivity. Think about how it can bring us back home with each other. The way Baruch says it is this:

In this Advent 2021, when we see so much difficulty because of our still present pandemic, we witness much strife and discrimination at home and abroad, we personally may feel some anxiety and stress.

Sometimes the right thing is to bask in the moonlight when the kids are still asleep and the world seems to be at peace. Sometimes the right thing is to rise up and help our neighbor, the one who is suffering...next door or around the world. And always, Gods will for us is to bring us back to our faithful place, out of the wilderness, out of captivity, along the moonlit highway back to Jerusalem.