

January 26, 2023

PERCEIVING GOD IN THE WINTER DOLDRUMS

It has been my pleasure to write nearly 200 of these messages since 2018, and each time inspiration has come readily, words flowed more or less freely. But not today. I face the empty page feeling bogged down, with the mental and physical energy of a slug.

Gazing out my window I see the same thing I have seen for days: rain, grey sky, barren trees, flat light, lifeless ground, with nary a cardinal or goldfinch to brighten the landscape. The winter doldrums have seized me, inside and out.

I flip through my topic file, browsing through ideas that excited me in perkier times, but none of them sparks any creativity in me today. Yet, I trust in God to supply my need, and so I plead, "I'm dry here, Lord, please help!"

I close the file and return my groggy gaze to the scene outside, where I find nothing changed, yet everything somehow different. God has shown himself to me anew in the dreary, sacred, everyday scene.

In a mere whisper, without fanfare or drama, He reminded me that He is Emmanuel -- "God with us" -- as He quietly reawakened me to his blessed provision of rain. Granted, in our fallen world (Genesis 3:17-19), excessive rain can bring flooding and hardship, as it has been doing lately in California. Yet in truth, rain is a precious and essential gift from God that we sometimes take for granted. How well I remember praying fervently for rain during the drought and forest fires here in 2016!

The value of rain is obvious in the Bible, in which agrarian people living in a dry climate have no trouble connecting it with life itself. Rain is readily recognized as God's blessing, e.g., "For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God" (Hebrews 6:7).

Urban dwellers today may have more trouble appreciating the life-giving gift of rainfall. Yet if we ponder God's everyday blessings through the lens of Holy Scripture, we can perceive Him in the gift of rain or whatever other aspect of his provision we see before us in Creation.

God has revealed himself in his created world since the beginning of time, which people throughout the ages have seen and still see today: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities -- his eternal power and divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20). But to stop there is to miss the far richer revelation of God in the Bible, where the grand story of his masterful plan to reunite himself and humankind through the love and redemptive mission of Jesus unfolds like a beautiful tapestry spanning all of time.

And the focal point of the the whole, glorious story is not just a nameless, impersonal "force of nature", but a real person with a given name -- Jesus. He arrived on earth two millennia ago "in the bleak midwinter", as the beautiful Christmas carol goes, to forever shine his light into this dark world.

So in whatever winter doldrums you may find yourself today, or may find yourself in in the future, He is Emmanuel, God with you. Look for his light and receive his love, even in a dreary, sacred, everyday scene.

"You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into joy"
(Psalm 18:28).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux