

December 15, 2024 - North Carolina Reflections

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(Isaiah 61)

Y'all know that I love my Advent rituals. Ridiculously love them. When I was having surgery last year at Thanksgiving time I got my window candles prepped early so they would be ready to go once advent hit. This year I jumped into Advent early. Women at the Well was talking about Advent in early November (it was a beautiful night) and I took their lead and our Adult Faith group had 4 weeks of Advent conversations and only the last week was actually in Advent.

Advent. A time of yearning. A time of darkness. A time of candle lighting in the darkness. A time of remembering the promises and prophecy. A time of feeling the power of hope swirling around the realities of broken. A time of trusting in what God does and will do in what is.

I sat in the glow of having lit my first Advent candle on December 1. All those seasonal emotions loosed into the light of a candle of hope. Sigh. Contentment. The comfort and power of ritual washing over me. And then it hit me - I was leaving in 2 days and would be away from the window candles, the tree lights, the night time devotional reading. I had spent 5 weeks prepping and practicing Advent and now, now when it was really here, I would be absent. I was absent from the familiar traditions I have created for Advent and I was immersed in a totally new expression of Advent. I was with an incredible group of Main Street Church folk, we were supported by all of you, we were picked up and chauffeured from the Charlotte airport and, after deciding the GPS didn't really mean for us to enter into the prison, found our way to a summer camp that had mostly been destroyed by landslide but which had 4 cabins remaining. One cabin for staff offices and meals. Three cabins to house the 60 volunteers that were on base.

We arrived just as the evening meeting was getting started. Outside, 31 degrees. I couldn't hear a thing that was being said. I was eager to get our luggage out of the cars and allow our drivers to head back home. With time that happened. We got assigned our bunks. I got a bottom bunk! In a different cabin from the other 4 (sad face). They ran out of food before we got in for dinner but they scurried around and soon we could serve ourselves - pasta, garlic bread and cornbread were the options.

I had a melt down when I went up to "their" cabin and felt left out of being in the mix with them. I went for a walk in the cold night air, took in the starry sky and found my way back to my cabin. I crawled in my sleeping bag surrounded by 19 people, none of whom were "my folk."

This was Advent. It was not of my design but it was Advent. We were there with others who had come, as Isaiah said, to bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,...They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities."

We were people seeking to reflect the light of the Advent candles into the devastation of the hurricane. We were bearers of tools for repairs, embodied the muscles to carry dry wall, had ears to hear the requests for propane to get through the night in hopes without power or in tents for those that had lost their houses. To be splashed by the icy water from the power washer. No, I was not sitting with a cat in my lap lighting a candle to remember the promise and yearning of Advent, I was plopped down in the middle of a group of people who were embodying that and acting, loving, doing to bind up the broken hearted. It was an incredible Advent ritual. A powerful reminder that there are so many who are working to bring light into the darkness, in NC and in Amesbury. God continues to call and provide. Something new is underway but it might look really different from what we had expected. Amen.

Joan MacPherson
Main Street Congregational UCC
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