

A photograph of a field of tall, thin grasses at sunset. The sun is a bright white circle on the horizon, casting a warm orange and yellow glow across the sky and the grass. The grasses in the foreground are out of focus, creating a soft, dreamy atmosphere.

The
weary world
rejoices

Invitation

An Opening Letter: Invitation to Advent

Dear Advent Adventurer,

This Advent season, we are examining two parallel themes: hospitality, and the title of this devotional, "The Weary World Rejoices.

The World is Weary. In Christ, the Weary World Rejoices. As we intentionally carve out time to examine the common themes of Advent - hope, love, joy, peace, and light - we will be confronted with two opposing things: the weariness of the world and the joy of Jesus. We will be participating in rhythms of spiritual discipline - fasting and feasting - that help form us and shape us into people who not only rejoice, but who are formed by the grace-filled hospitality of Jesus.

Hospitality confronts the weariness of the world by infusing a new song into the mix. Hospitality partakes in the rejoicing, inviting others into the sacred celebration.

Because hospitality is all about grace.

Inviting another person to share your space takes the kind of grace that forgives both blunders and egregious sins. Hospitality is not afraid of quirkiness or stuttering or tics or clumsiness. Hospitality speaks words of life without fear of punishment or embarrassment.

A hospitable space is one of comfort, warmth, and invitation. *You are welcome here.* It's not a trite "make yourself at home," which colloquially implies, "only as much as I'm comfortable with."

Hospitality is sacrificial, a denial of self on self's turf to invite another soul into the newly shared space for the purpose of mutual benefit and blessing - shared space turns into shared relationship, shared struggles, and shared life. It's more than coffee together on a Friday morning - it's a sacred alliance, a sacred space of sharing that is blessed and guarded and precious.

Hospitality makes away for accountability - being truly known and truly knowing allows space for becoming better, purer, and more excellent. Accountability without hospitality is just judgment, a utilitarian relationship without kinship-inspired friendship. This hospitable friendship is a safe place for anguished tears and rendered hearts. Broken-hearted souls find refuge in hospitable places, because these are places of mending, nurture, and healing -- places of tissues, hot tea, and scones.

Hospitality is more than charity - showers and haircuts for homeless help for a day, yet hospitality lives life alongside the downtrodden. Hospitality is not afraid of weird smells or uncertain days. Hospitality is strong, calm, and courageous. Charity gives without receiving true worth in return. Hospitality is a dance of generosity, where the giver gives gifts to the receiver, who in return shares the favor by giving back.

Hospitality is a paradox - a *both-and* - it's both selfless and reviving, both energy and peace, both work and stillness, both full and empty. It's both quiet and thrills of delight. Hospitality is many things because it may occur in many venues and avenues. Millionaires and beggars, clergy and scoundrels, middle-class and immigrants, all ethnicities, all ages, all persons - these are the people of hospitality. All are invited to practice hospitality, and even moreso, those who follow Christ, because Christ demonstrates hospitality in the events of Advent and Christmas.

In Advent, we await the celebration of Christ's first coming to a specific time, people, and place - to Israel in the geographical area of Syria-Palestine, during the time of the Roman Empire around the turn of the millenia, over 2000 years ago. Jesus was born to a Jewish woman named Mary, engaged then married to a Jewish carpenter named Joseph. Geography, culture, religion, ethnicity - all of these indicate the context of Jesus, and by understanding Jesus in his own context, we can understand him in ours. To do this, we step back in time, we step across in space, and we zoom in our focus on the events of Advent. These we celebrate.

But we also anticipate, as Advent points us not just to Christ's birth, but to his victorious Second Coming, where all things will be made new and all injustices will be made right, *when the weary world will finally and fully rejoice*. We all long for the redemption of the world. But in the meantime, we wait, we count off years, seasons, and holidays, and this season, we celebrate Advent.

This Advent journey will challenge you. Hospitality takes our focus off of ourselves - so does fasting, and so does feasting, for that matter. Every week, you will be invited to engage in spiritually-forming activities that will create rhythms of simplicity and connection -- lean into the disciplines that affront comfort and apathy. Discover what these activities are teaching you, and embrace the whittling that happens.

Enjoy the lights, feasts, and celebrations. Learn from the darkness, fasts, and quietness. Embrace new or renewed company. You are invited into this Advent Season as we practice hospitality and rejoice in the midst of this weary world.

It's a delight to share this space with you.

Rev. Emily Hines