



Advent Reflection for Friday, December 3

Colleen Lang

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

Jeremiah 33.14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

I'm reading this passage as I lay with my youngest son in his bed; his eyes are closed and I'm waiting for his breathing to continue slowing down and bear more weight, until I know that he is asleep. Up until about now, he had been crying - a wet, messy, choking kind of crying, where his whole body tensed around his tears. His father had made him brush his teeth "first," before his brother, and that simply was not fair. He had brushed his teeth first last night. And they were supposed to take turns.

While it is easy to question, balk or even giggle at the rationality of a tired 5-year old, there was something about the way his crying became more earnest every time he used the word "unfair" that I was able to latch onto.

First, I know that my son hasn't yet developed the cognitive flexibility to accept "unfair." Things are just or they are unjust. And when they are unjust, they just shouldn't be. And yet, don't those of us who have long ago moved through that developmental milestone -- to understand that life is not that black and white -- don't we still suffer sometimes from something very similar to my son's torment, anyway? We also emotionally tantrum in the face of unfairness, become indignant when things don't operate as they 'should,' and sometimes bang our heads up against the walls of reality, on some level operating on the assumption that doing so will break them. When really, all it does is give us massive headaches. Or in my son's case, a pillow wet with tears and mucus.

Today was a long day. One of my clients attempted suicide in the morning and has spent most of the day in the emergency room, awaiting admission. I am confused and self-blaming, trying to recall the signs I might have missed, the mental whips of what I could have, should have done, lashing straight through to my gut.

And as I lay here, my first response to this passage is a feeling of hopefulness. Knowing what's to come certainly allows us the acceptance of pain and injustice that is so hard to come by; it gives us more patience

and tolerance. When the subway conductor can tell us when the train will move, when we know what our place is on line or when the rain will stop, what treatment will be offered, when we know there will be a fair trial, an answer, a cure, a change, We endure.

Yesterday, on the phone with my client, I tried to help her endure by telling her that if she hangs on and keeps working with me, that we would find ourselves on the other side of this moment of pain; I told her it was worth the chance of a few more months, or even a few more days, just to see.

I was trying to give her hope.

But this passage is about more than hope. It's about hope for righteousness. It's about faith in righteousness. Faith that as unfair and painful as things are, they will be arranged in an order for good. There is always a coming, a Christmas, where the goodness of the heart of humanity somehow aligns for justice, for meaning, for exaltation. Things might not be fair nor make sense to us now, and yet, we can bear it, because they will.

Yesterday, my client was at work while we had our call. We kept being interrupted by customers coming into her shop, and I could hear how she greeted them. She was respectful and welcoming; she treated every one of those customers as if she was genuinely happy to see them. I know what she's been through, and I know how she has been treated herself; I know how, even this week, she has been badly hurt. It dawns on me that I have to validate the unfairness of this for her. And I have to tell her that the goodness of her own heart is not in vain. It is these acts, these smiles she gives, this way of caring, connecting, extending, treating humans fairly and as perfectly human; it is our God-driven actions, our own attempts to follow Jesus in the dark, that all must be the basis of our faith in what's to come.

I tell my son, just before his body starts to relax and he curls into me, that he can brush his teeth second for the next two nights in a row. Maybe it gives him hope? Maybe it is what finally gives him some peace and helps him fall asleep. I tell myself so, as that feels more hopeful to me than thinking that he just wore himself out. After all, he is the only person who he has thus far proven he can't wear out.

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (En Español: 1-888-628-9454; Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889) or the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.

Colleen Lang is a clinical psychologist. She lives in Windsor Terrace with her husband and two sons, Sebastian (8) and Lucas (5). They all feel very fortunate to have been welcomed by the community at Holy Apostles three years ago.

