



Advent Reflection for Sunday, December 5

Jeremy Sierra

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

Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Several years ago I was part of a small church that met around a meal on Sunday evenings. The community was only a few months old when I began attending, and at first there were usually only a few of us, a small group that felt welcoming and familiar - mostly people in their twenties who were at home with religious ritual and eager to connect. I was new to New York and lonely and it was just what I needed. Then the church started to grow. New people arrived, some of them like me, 20-something college graduates looking for community and a spiritual home, some of them with no home of any kind and seeking a meal. It became a bit less predictable and a bit less easy. There were uncomfortable moments when others acted just slightly inappropriately - spoke during periods that were meant for silence or drank a bit too much of the communion wine. Some were not well. Some were just unfamiliar with liturgy. But the community also became deeper and richer.

After the meal and scripture readings and a sermon, everyone was invited to share a response to the reading if they wished. Sometimes people would cry. Sometimes it would be uncomfortable to hear

others expressing their pain or confusion or just talking for way too long. But it was almost always moving. The stories and perspectives of the community taught me different ways of understanding the world and different ways of seeing God. I'm no longer part of that community for various reasons, but I still think fondly of it.

Welcoming someone into your community is inherently risky. It requires us to be vulnerable. The ones we welcome could be cruel. They could hurt us. They might just not like us very much.

We all crave that safe, stable place for ourselves, whether it's our church community, our neighborhood, our country. And it is necessary to have places where we feel safe and cared for, particularly those who are especially vulnerable or have been harmed in the past. At the same time, it seems to me that seeking too strenuously to maintain comfort and stability is dangerous. This makes it difficult to change. Difficult to be vulnerable to one another and open our arms and our communities to others.

Maintaining that safe, predictable home by shutting others out ultimately diminishes us. That's not community. That's not love. Welcoming others is a gift. It gives us the opportunity to understand a bit more of the world we live in, see a bit more of God, love more people. It's how we grow: in love, through love, with open arms.

Jeremy Sierra lives in Park Slope with his wife, Denise, and their daughters, Jojo and Natalia. He is a writer currently working for Johns Hopkins University and a climate activist in his free time.

