

Wisdom Sayings of 2023 Reading: John 1:1-18 New Year's Eve, 2023
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Benedict's Episcopal Church, Los Osos CA

Do you have a favorite passage of Scripture? Perhaps it is one that gives you hope or one that offers you comfort in times of trial. For me, the most powerful passage in Scripture is the Prologue of John which was read from today's gospel. This passage of Scripture attempts to describe the first Christmas story- when God breaks forth in creation, leaving a divine imprint on all created matter. John refers to this divine imprint as the *Logos*, commonly translated as the *Word*.

Last week on December 25th, we celebrated the second Christmas story, narrated from the gospel of Luke. This 2nd Christmas story is about the Divine Word entering into human history through a helpless, brown, middle eastern, Jewish baby, born of a yet-to-be-married couple. And from his fullness, we have received grace upon grace. I hope that your celebration of Christmas was one of love, for this is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love!

But today, our focus is on the first Christmas Story. In this story, there is no baby, no magi, no Mary and Joseph, no manger, no shepherds. Instead, this story takes place at the very beginning, even before the beginning of time. When the big bang finally unleashed its energy some 13.8 billion years ago, God revealed God's self through the physical realm. By this time, God no longer remained a total mystery but instead chose to reveal the divine essence through creation. This means that God's Word, God's imprint, God's DNA, God's wisdom, God's light, and God's love is embedded in everything that is created, including you and me. As a result of having this divine imprint within, we can love one another as generously as God loves us.

The good news is that God's Word is not limited to Jesus, or the Holy Scriptures, or only to those places where religion has deemed sacred. If we want to connect with God, we do not have to look outside ourselves, or above, or in a church, or even in the sacraments. We simply need to recognize the light of Christ shining in each person, in each creature, in each molecule. This is what the fullness of the incarnation is all about. Spirit and matter are not in opposition but united, both having intrinsic value. As St. John would say: "All things came into being through [this Word], and without [this Word] not one thing came into being." {Jn 1:3}

This *Word of God* has been spoken through the prophets over the centuries, through nature and all its miracles. This Word of God is spoken through the creatures of the earth if we would only listen. One of the ways I hear the Word of God spoken, is through the wisdom of others who choose love over fear. Each year, I collate all of the wisdom saying that I have collected in the past 12 months and then share them with my congregation. What follows, is only a sample of those wisdom sayings for 2023.

Healing

- *To heal a wound, you need to stop touching it.
- *If you never heal from what hurt you, you'll bleed on people who didn't cut you.
- * The hardest part of healing after you have lost someone you love, is to recover the "you" that went away with "them".
- * Being negative only makes a journey more difficult. You may be given a cactus, but you don't have to sit on it.
- * Maturity is working through your trauma and not using it as a never-ending excuse for poor behavior.
- * Don't waste your time in anger, regrets, worries, and grudges. Life is too short to be unhappy.
- * Sometimes you have to let go of the picture of what you thought life would be like and learn to find joy in the story you're living.
- * The most influential person in your life is the one you refuse to forgive.
- * Healing is necessary, so you can hear what is being said without the filter of your wound.
- * Look forward with hope, not backward with regret... You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.
- *Shame dies when stories are told in safe places.
- * You are not the darkness you endured. You are the light that refused to surrender.

Worry/Fear

- *Fear does not stop death. It stops life. And worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles. It takes away today's peace.
- *Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation you have with God about things God can change.
- *If you can't do anything about it then let it go. Don't be a prisoner to things you can't change.
- *If it is fixable, no need to worry. If it is not fixable, also no need to worry. Dali Lama
- *Don't worry if people don't like you. Most people are struggling to like themselves.
- *Don't be afraid of death. Be afraid of an unlived life.
- *No amount of regret changes the past. No amount of anxiety changes the future. But any amount of gratitude changes the present.

Spiritual Growth:

- *The most important spiritual growth doesn't happen when you're meditating or on a yoga mat. It happens in the midst of conflict- when you are frustrated, angry or scared and you're doing the same old thing, and then you suddenly realize that you have a choice to do it differently.
- *You only need Power when you want to do something Harmful. Otherwise, Love is enough to get everything done.
- *The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds. Tomas Merton
- *People change for two reasons: Either their minds have been opened or their hearts have been broken.
- * This is how you pray continually- not by offering prayers in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer.
St. Basil the Great
- *The biggest communication problem is...we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.
- *Forgiveness is the process where we can heal the hurts we don't deserve. Forgiveness is freeing ourselves from a straight-jacket of resentment and rage that destroy relationships and rob us of joy.

Grief:

- *The point is not (and will never be) to stop the grief. That is like stopping the ocean. The point is to find ways to swim.
- *Grief is really just love. It is all the love you want to give but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

Practical Advice

- *Life is like a camera...Focus on what's important. Capture the good times. Develop from the negatives. And if things don't work out, take another shot.
- *Stop being offended by a Facebook post, by a piece of art, by people displaying affection, or by what someone said to you. Be offended by war, poverty, greed, and injustice.
- *Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day, saying, "I will try again tomorrow."
- * Ships don't sink because of the water around them. Ships sink because of the water that gets in them. Don't let what's happening around you get inside you and weigh you down.
- * The best revenge is none. Heal, move on, and don't become like those who hurt you.
- *The world you see is created by what you focus on. It is never too late to adjust your lens.
- *The further a society drifts from truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.
- *Most people don't really want the truth. They just want constant reassurance that what they believe is the truth.

Church/Religion

- * The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair.
- *The Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course. St. Boniface
- *The role of a Pastor is not to grow a big church. The Pastor's role is to grow mature disciples who make disciples.
- *A pastor must have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the skin of a rhinoceros. Charles Spurgeon.
- *We desperately need to explore how much of our understanding of the gospel is American and how much is biblical.
- *Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Christ.
- *Love is never wasted, for its value does not rest upon reciprocity.
- *If everything around seems dark, look again, you may be the light.

Love:

- *When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose being kind and you will always be right.
- *People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason why the world is in chaos is because things are being loved and people are being used. (Dali Lama)
- *Always leave people better than you found them. Hug the hurt. Kiss the broken. Befriend the lost.
- * Do your little bit of good where you are. It's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world. Desmond Tutu
- *Jesus said: No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. [Jn. 15]

Wisdom from a Dog

- *There are many secrets of happiness and love that we can learn from a good dog like:
 - When your loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
 - Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.
 - Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
 - Take naps.
 - Stretch before rising.
 - Run, romp, and play daily.
 - Thrive on attention and let people touch you.
 - Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
 - On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass.
 - On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.
 - When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
 - Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.
 - Be faithful.
 - Never pretend to be something you're not.
 - If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
 - When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle them gently.

A Blessing:

"Life is short, and we have never too much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the dark journey with us. So be swift to love, make haste to be kind. And go in peace to love and serve the Lord."