

I am still processing Mother Barbara's sermon last Sunday on thresholds. Wasn't that a powerful sermon? I think it was so powerful and so meaningful to many of us because she nailed us. She named the existence of the thresholds in our lives and forced us to claim them. It is the claiming that we are still doing, and the understanding of our claiming that we must live into. How wonderful is it that we are in the season of Advent, the time of anticipating the birth not only of Jesus, but of ourselves as we begin to live into the new understanding we have of ourselves. We claim our presence in what theologian Karl Barth described as 'between the times'ⁱ, and as Mother Barbara said, standing at the thresholds of our lives, looking backwards and looking forwards. Advent defines for us that time when we are allowed to be 'in between' what was and what is and what is to come. And, if we sat this past week in being at our thresholds, I imagine some of us may have come to the realization that we were at a pretty challenging time and space in our lives. We may have asked God 'now what'? What do I do with this spiritual awareness of being in a place that is uncomfortable? How do I get across the threshold?

For some of us who hold fast to the belief in the 'coming of Christ' that the Advent season promises, this is not a hard place to be. We know that with Christ's coming, comes salvation. The words of second Isaiah "Comfort, O comfort ..." carry the meaning of the promise of Christ's coming at the day of judgment whether that is the end times of this Christian era, the end times of our lives, or the end of indecision to cross the threshold.

But, for others of us for whom this second coming doesn't quite make sense, we are standing at thresholds we have claimed, not being drawn across. We may not understand why there is a 'second coming', why people have to be divided into good and bad, why Jesus seems to be judgmental. In the reading of Peter's second letter this morning, he explained to his first century audience who expected Christ's imminent return that Christ was coming back but was waiting for all of us 'to repent', to get our act together, so that there will be no separation among us. Jesuit theologian James Allison explains in his book *Raising Abel*, "In this way the End, rather than being a vengeful conclusion to time, comes to be a principle, operative in time, by means of which we may live out the arrival of the Son of Man, the being alert for the thief in the night ..."ii So we live righteously.

And, yet, we look forward from our thresholds and see a wilderness. We need to be drawn across into our faithfulness. We need a John the Baptist to call out to us from the wilderness, from that place of I-have-no-idea-where-that-is. We need to hear that voice cry out to us, assure us that comfort awaits us as we leave the place of discomfort. We need to hear the voice that tells us 'come on in, the water is fine'. This is the 'good news of Jesus Christ, Mark said in the opening of his gospel. You can cross the threshold because Jesus is on the other side as well.

Jesus embodies all that we don't even know about to cross over into new life, into that new beginning of leaving what was and going to what will be. I mean, we may not know, and how can we know, what the wilderness is about unless we go there. And for some of us, why would we even go when the familiar of the complacency of where we are gives comfort? How can we be convinced that by putting our trust in God, and stepping out in the faith there is going to be ground to walk on on the other side? And, if our knees quake, and our step is unsure, like Peter who lost his faith walking on water, how do we know we're not going to drown? How do we keep listening for the voice from within that cries out to us, that goads us on? Some of you may be reminded by these questions of the guided meditation we did at the healing retreat. We know we must follow the voice that cries out and tells us that a new life awaits us, and that our new life is one that is grounded in faith and trust, the promise of Christ' coming again for all of us. We know that the Way made across the threshold is better than standing there in fear or bewilderment. In our trust to take that first step, even with eyes closed, we have embraced, maybe without realization, that we are under-girded by God's faithfulness to us through the outstretched hand of Jesus to follow him. There is comfort in the outstretched hand of Christ, welcoming us, as we step across our thresholds into an understanding of our new lives, our 'Jerusalem', as Isaiah idealizes it.

This is the new life that John the Baptist offered to those who came to be baptized by him in the Jordan. Each one who came to him was stepping over a threshold that had stopped them from living fully into the life God had offered, and continues to offer to us. For us as Christians, it is a new life defined by our connection to the goodness and love that we are promised in Jesus' teachings, his death to the

kind of life that negated the life God offered, and in his resurrection which we know to be the newness of life. This is what we the Church are offering/offered to baby Olivia this morning as she will be/was baptized by the waters of eternal life. She will be receiving/received the eternal connection to the promise of an ever-renewing life. When we stand with her as witnesses, we are not just sending her out into world with all our hope of a good Christian life, but we are those, like in the Moses story, picking her basket up out of the water, and giving her to her Mother Church to raise her in our love and goodness. We the Church carry her across the thresholds of her young life until she is ready to cross them herself. And, this is what happens in each of our lives again and again as we come to each threshold that stops us. We decide through our faith that we're not going to be daunted by the mountains and the valleys and the stony paths that keep us from crossing over into new life. We have been baptized in the eternal waters of unending life which continue to renew our steps every step along the Way. Amen.

ⁱBartlett, David L. et al., Eds. *Feasting on the Word: Advent Companion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2014. p. 39.

ⁱⁱAllison, James. *Raising Abel: The Recovery of Eschatological Imagination*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co. 1996. p. 127.