

Daily Advent Devotions

ADVENT

A Time of Hope

PAULA D'ARCY



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I ONCE SPENT A NIGHT IN A SMALL wayfarer's cottage in the Texas hill country with my friend, Macrina. After a simple dinner, we decided to hike through the woods and sit on a bluff overlooking the river to wait for the rising of the moon. We gauged the moon's rising by its appearance the previous evening and set out expectantly. We laughed

at how well we were fortified with light snacks, nylon jackets and a large flashlight. At the bluff, we found the perfect sitting rock and sat down to wait. Then we waited. And waited. And waited still. The moon actually began to emerge in the eastern sky so far past our calculations that we almost gave up the vigil. But tired though we were, the walk back to the cottage is my treasured memory of the evening. Our walking path was now fully illuminated from above, the light outlining the many deer who walked nearby through the scrub cedar, their hooves clicking against loose stones and their brown flanks brushing against nearby branches. I remember thinking how fortunate we were to be walking in that glow at the heart of night.

Advent heralds the light: New light shed on old conclusions; the light of hope against the force of darkness; the light from within working to penetrate ignorance; the light of knowledge filling our lives with the beauty and wisdom of those who have walked this human path before us and opened the way. As Christmas offers itself once again, we step toward it as the shepherds, little guessing what it will illuminate in our circle of days. But we step nevertheless, uttering a deep prayer that humankind will listen. We pray that our meager readings and the small offering of our attention will benefit not only ourselves, but the many with whom we inhabit this beautiful Earth. We pray to the Holy One: *Pierce our hearts with love great enough to change our ways. It is time.*



Savoring Life

I SIT BY THE OCEAN AT SUNRISE when the sudden noise of a diesel engine interrupts the quiet. A large tractor trailer is edging its way along a narrow stretch of pavement that leads to the beach. Two cement planters line the small strip of road, and the truck brushes against their yellow blossoms as it squeezes in between. Diesel fumes pump from the exhaust. Finally I hear the swoosh and hiss of brakes, and the driver steps down, door flung open, engine running. Just for a moment he inhales deeply and lets his eyes follow the seagulls that skim the water in a long, black line. He breathes in again. Then he's back in his seat furiously working the side mirrors in order to back up safely between the planters and reach the ease of the road. Long after he leaves, I still feel his presence.

I know I would never have maneuvered a large rig through such a tight space for a single breath of salt air. But he did. The moment was worth it to him. What it would feel like to live with such longing? And what world would we create if we all savored such things? Responding from a greater awareness alters everything.

Today: *Even when I feel like I am not making progress, give me patience to keep going. If I change the way I relate to life, everything else will open up.*

Reach Out to Love

ADVENT IS A CALL TO REMEMBER those who live on the margins and cannot find their way. It is a call to care for those living in private hells of anxiety and despair. It is a call to remember those in prison. It is a reminder of individuals who are not famous or flashy but who work tirelessly to create a better world. Advent is a call to reach out in compassion, to serve Love in all our actions.

On a recent air flight, two passengers seated in my row were taken ill. The first was an elderly woman who had probably not eaten well enough that morning. She began to black out. The second passenger was an elderly man who had forgotten to take his medication for diabetes. When the flight attendants asked anyone in the medical field to come forward, a young male nurse responded. His long hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and he had the most wonderful way with the frightened passengers. Once both of them were improving with oxygen, he returned to the elderly woman, put a hand on her shoulder and said softly, "You'll be okay." It was as much his manner as his words. *You'll be okay.* On the pivot of just such loving kindness, so much rests.

Today: *Teach me, Loving God, to be an instrument of your peace. Remind me to reach out my own hand. Kindness and love are not the responsibility of someone else. Loving is up to me.*



Movement of the Spirit

No longer will your Teacher hide himself . . . This is the way; walk in it. Isaiah 30:20-21

MARY SHOUTS AN IMMENSE *yes* to life.

Yes, this is the way, and I will walk this path without looking back. I will accept the life being held out to me. Yes, I am willing to embrace all that is asked. Yes, I will open my eyes to the movement of Spirit in life.

Two friends are each raising daughters who have great physical limitations and challenges. Watching their mother's love has been deeply moving. They respond tirelessly to the demands that are part of their caretaking. "This is the way; walk in it." And they walk without complaint. Their willingness makes me think of the plant, fireweed, which grows in ground that has been scorched by fire. The slender stem rises up against the odds, its soft columns of crimson petals flashing like fire in the light. Here is our own invitation: to flash like fire on the path life holds out to us. To take our circumstances, our gifts, our deficits and see past them to the stirring of life. Can I/will I walk this path? Will I move from belief into sight? Will I embrace all that lies before me and within me? Will I, too, embody the infant birth?

Today: *Grant me courage, Dear God, to grow even if the ground beneath me is scorched by fire.*

This Day Is My Life

WHEN WE WALKED ALONG the Underground Railroad route, cars frequently slowed down to take in the sight of two women, tents and water strapped to their backpacks, walking slowly in the sweltering humidity of a south Alabama heat wave. Many passersby waved, usually in disbelief that anyone would walk in such heat. Some honked horns. But few people actually stopped. I was most fascinated by those who slowed to a crawl, considered stopping, but then went on. Sometimes we whispered to those cars, "Come on. Do it. Take a chance." Then we'd let out a little cheer for anyone who overcame their initial hesitation and risked the encounter.

Late at night I'd think about the hearts of those who wanted to stop, considered it, but then drove on. It's easy to circle the edges of life, occasionally feeling the impulse to live fully, yet choosing, instead, the default position of familiarity and safety. It's easier to live busy lives than to ask larger questions. Easier to overwork than face the decisions we avoid and the truths that demand change.

If I don't stop today to change my course, then when? Days slip by. Opportunities waste away. Hours are not merely hours. That's the illusion. Hours are my life. This day *is* my life.

Today: *Grant me courage to do whatever it takes not to let another day slip by. This is my life.*

A Christmas Prayer

WHEN LIFE FORCES US TO WRESTLE with what's difficult, give us courage.

Teach us that there is a purpose in everything we experience, and everything is more than it appears to be.

This world is permeated by your Presence, and *is* your Presence in form.

May we be drawn to your Voice above the other, competing voices.

Great and Holy one, we pray for Peace.

Take us to the abode of Peace for which all hearts long.

WE PRAY TO FIND STILLNESS WITHIN our busyness, and Rest in the midst of our celebrations and activity.

Show us how to walk more gently, more patiently, on the Earth.

Let Kindness be born within all hearts.

Teach us to draw together as one people.


One humanity.

One heart.

One spirit.

One longing.

May our prayer rise up like fire and be Light for a troubled world. This we know, Something is trying to be born in us. Take our hand as we set out anew.

Two lit candles are shown in the lower half of the page. The candle on the left is taller and has a larger flame, while the one on the right is shorter and has a smaller flame. Both are lit, with bright orange and yellow flames and a soft glow. The background is dark and out of focus.

PAULA D'ARCY is an internationally recognized author and speaker. Her many books include *Gift of the Red Bird*, *Sacred Threshold* and *When People Grieve*.