

Today's Advent Devotional is offered by Dr. Carla Sherrell

Living in God's Fullness

This season of joy can be complex and difficult for those who are grieving. This is so for me. During Advent 2015, my son, Daniel, became ill and passed at the end of the year. The focus of that Advent was departure, rather than coming, as I helped hold my son in his process of transition from this realm.

Soon after Daniel's passing, I said to my personal counselor that I would never experience joy or peace again. She is a very good therapist, so she did not disagree with me. Instead, she supported me as I slowly contemplated joy and peace in the context of my almost unbearable grief.

Through the grace of God, prayer (that has included some serious yelling at God), work with my therapist, and the support of my partner and other loved ones who have prayed for me, fed my body, and stayed up with me at night (and through other means known and unknown



to me), joy and peace have returned to my life. Yet, their quality is different than before my son's passing. They arrive more quietly; I have to look for, and notice them in ways that I did not have to before. I most often encounter them as sensations in my body before having words for them. They arrive in stillness and movement. Joy is often expansiveness in my chest. Peace is a settling into my seat or an awareness of my body's easeful movement through the elements when I am taking a walk.

As joy and peace become more present in my life, I have learned that they do not replace grief. They sit next to my grief moment-to-moment, day-to-day, and year-to-year. This side-by-side

dynamic often appears during worship. Whether I am attending via Livestream or I am physically in the building at 5th and Ridge, through the structure, fluidity, and communion of worship, I access the soothing waters of joy and peace along with the sadness and longing of my grief. And, in those moments, I am reminded, in a deeply sacred way, that all of me is known, held, and re-membered by God and the ancestors.

In preparing this piece, looking for Advent scriptures, I was guided to Isaiah 55:12.

*You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.*

The text is about transition from exile and bondage to home and liberation. For me, it speaks to my beloved Daniel's Advent journey of four years ago—a journey of leaving, *and* of arriving--indeed coming--into perfect love, joy, and peace.

Amen.