We grow weary of waiting

With years of hindsight and our knowledge that the Israelites made it to the promised land in the end, it can sometime be easy for use to chastise the "whiny" Israelites in the wilderness. After all, God DID provide. Maybe they were thirsty, but God did provide water. Maybe manna wasn't what they imagined eating for supper, but it was nourishment. And, hey, eventually most of them made it to the promised land. So sometimes it can be easy for us to mutter as we read "Get over it Israelites! It's fine! God walked with you. God provided for you. And you made it. You got your happy ending.

But WE weren't in the desert with the Israelites. We weren't the ones crying out "how long oh, Lord?" We can (and do) read the story from our comfortable couches with our nice cold soda in our hand and a bag of chips on the coffee table. Or, for many of us, we hear the story in church and know we will head home to a nice lunch in our comfortable cars.

When something isn't our own lived experience, it's hard, indeed, impossible for us to understand it from the viewpoint of the person who is living it. We like our comfort and our privilege and as a result, we don't try. Keeping a distance and opining from afar is the easy answer. Accompaniment-walking with weary, exhausted, and frustrated siblings- on their journey is hard. We don't know what to do or what to say and so we become armchair coaches or critics. "If only they would do it this way…," we think. "If only the Israelites had worked harder and fought less the wilderness would have been easier. If only the Israelites would have said thank you when water was provided, they would have been happier." Those seem like silly, exaggerated examples, but you get the point.

Today our BIPOC siblings and other marginalized populations are the ones crying out "how long oh Lord". People are tired of waiting for inclusion and equity and an end to privilege and supremacy. Feeling exhausted and defeated, many wonder when justice will roll down as Amos prophesied and when Martin Luther King Junior's dream will really come true. Like the Israelites in the dessert and those awaiting a long-promised king who seems to never be coming, they are weary. It's been long enough. When will it end. How long oh Lord, how long, until the promised land? How long until we can rejoice in the birth of the newborn king and the promises of hope and joy. How long until , as Martin Luther Junior dreamed, "we lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children". The world is exhausting, the promised land seems far away and the babe in the mange may never come.

So, children of God, what do we do?

We have a choice. When we see someone, anyone, engulfed in struggle and weary of waiting, whether they are wrestling with systemic injustices of racism or poverty or sexism or individual battles with cancer or abuse or addiction, what do we do? Do we look on from afar, sit on our comfortable couches and offer opinions? Are we full of could have and should have advice? Or do we choose to walk with our siblings in Christ in their challenges and struggles. Christ didn't sit afar. Christ came to us, a baby in the manger, born in a lowly, humble place to those who

cried out, to those in need. Christ came to accompany then, and Christ still comes to accompany and to walk among us today.

You may have heard the story or seen the photo of Christ in the Rubble. In December of 2023, outside Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestinian Christians wrapped a baby Jesus figure in a keffiyeh cloth and laid him in a pile of rubble as his manger bed. In 2024, as Reverend Dr. Munther Isaac preached, "this year, we say, "Christ is still in the rubble." This is His manger. Jesus finds His place with the marginalized, the tormented, the oppressed, and the displaced. We look at the Holy Family and see them in every displaced and homeless family, living in despair. In the Christmas story, God walks with them and calls them His own."

Dr Isaac says, "With this hope and faith, we endure. We refuse to surrender to despair, because ours is a faith of resurrection. From the midst of the rubble, a plant of life will arise, giving the promise of a new dawn. The assurance of a harvest where justice and restoration will flourish, and the vine will bear fruit that nourishes generations to come. As the poet Mahmoud Darwish said: "The grains of a dying ear of grain, fill the valley with ears of grain. We embrace our calling in this wounded world and land. We insist on seeing the image of Jesus in every victim of oppression, marginalization, and violent ideologies of supremacy and Empire. We will continue to declare the goodness and justice of God."

In this season of advent, as we wait for the babe to come to us, among us, we are reminded that we are called to the rubble, we are called to the margins, we are called to those who cry out in despair, in grief, and in loneliness. We are called, not to offer advice from afar, but to walk with, to accompany, and to get our hands and feet dirty. We are called to sit in the rubble and to weep with our siblings. We are called to stand up from the rubble and to proclaim justice and to advocate.

And yes, we grow weary, but as Dr. Isaac reminds us, we live with the hope and the faith that God walks with every one of us and calls us his own. The baby in the manger comes to walk with all of us in our moments of despair and our weariness and our struggles. The baby is born to all of us in the rubble of our lives. Christ is in the rubble and Christ is with us.

Amen