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What Does Our Faith Say?

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

An acquaintance said to me the other day, “You know, the world seems pretty scary right now – what does your faith say we should be doing?”

What a great and profound question.

Our world *is* scary now. Public mourning has barely finished after one mass shooting or terrorist attack before the next one happens. What does it mean to live in a world where people attending a Christmas parade are run down as a driver careens through the parade? Or where a 15-year-old shoots and kills four classmates at school?

What level of hate – or illness – could drive that behavior? What *does* our faith say? What should we do? Can scripture help us?

St. Luke tells us how John the Baptist responded when crowds asked him a similar question about events in their world. (Luke 3:7-18). John’s approach

to world events and to daily living in his time could point the way for us in ours.

First, John gives them the context in which they found themselves – God was about to do a new thing, and they should bear fruits worthy of repentance, remembering the wrath to come.

And then, just as John has the people's attention, and their fear, one of them says, "What then should we do?" And John answers them by shifting to the radically local, daily lives of people – to their immediate reality.

John tells them to be honest; to be kind and share what they have with those who don't; to work hard and not threaten or accuse others. Then John drives his point home and talks about the coming of the Messiah that will put everything into perspective.

John says that each little deed we do helps prepare the way for God's entry into a world that seems so dark and fearful. Each deed done with that perspective ennobles the deed and gives it power – to change the doer and to change the world.

That message is a good summary of our Christian theology.

John the Baptist tells us that Christ is coming again – the clear message of Advent. We are preparing to celebrate and remember when Christ came into the world the first time, while anticipating and preparing for His return at the end of the age, at the Second Coming.

A hero of mine, the Rev. Carol Anderson, used to say that the parish church is the hope of the world, where so many noble deeds are gathered together for God's glory and the healing of the world.

We can see Christ's coming in the daily, regular, routine rhythm of life. Even as we forget, even as we are distracted, even as we wander – thank God for the ways this parish community and all parish communities can pull us back.

So, what *does* our faith say about what we should do?

Pray – engage the true privilege of ongoing conversation with God

Give thanks – for all that God has given

Celebrate – the gift of life, love, forgiveness, hope, and . . . (you fill in the rest)

Think outside yourself – do something concrete to help someone else

Study – learn about our ancient tradition for it to shape our lives

Give intentionally – let your gifts reflect who you are and the unique child of God who is the recipient

Remind – yourself and others of the real meaning of the Christmas season

Advocate – champion a cause or someone with little voice

Share – give more of yourself with this community

Be honest, kind, and hardworking

Treat those with whom we disagree more gently

Somehow, someway, spend some time alone

Through it all, what our faith says for this scary world is to live more intentionally as Christians and be aware of our over-arching Christian faith and hope – that God has become one of us in Christ Jesus, loves us, and has plans for us. Yes, judgment is coming, but grace is the extravagant gift.

That is the true joy of this season, a joy that has long attacked the scary darkness.