

Brief Reflection for the New Year: Grateful for the Opportunity in 2018 to be, with You, for Others

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It may be counterintuitive to consider 2018 to be a year of promise. The prospect of loss of health care, growing inequality, permissiveness of racist and nativist rhetoric and reaction, promotion of resource extraction, damage of mass incarceration and theft from the future – let alone the present – of the poor and vulnerable in the United States (I do not say “our land, America” because it belongs to Native peoples here long before us), surely portend harm at flood levels. And if we consider from a U.S.-resident perspective the global front of wars and threats of wars, the ignoring of human rights where it suits our interests, border closings to refugees fleeing conflict and violence and the erosion of democracy, our efforts may appear to be nothing more than the rearrangement of the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Sobering.

However, *hubris* for any of the tools of the “powers and principalities,” rooted in systems of greed and domination, provides a threshold for their own demise; from the lens of faith and spirit, they are doomed ultimately to fail. Signs of hope: Moses encountered a burning bush. Mary forecast “the mighty falling from their thrones and the lifting up of the lowly.” Buddhism suggests that salvation is available in this present moment (the here and now). In this “now”, I stand resolutely grateful for the opportunity to be, with you, in the struggle for others. If we look closely, the seeds of a common liberation are being sown before us.

Consider the DACA grantees who are paving the way to the Dream Act becoming reality, risking all to organize and mobilize regardless of their status of documentation. Consider the young people and countless officials, authorities and elected representatives who are creating mentoring programs, alternatives to incarceration and educational possibilities that will grow a generation of leaders who will persist and overcome. Consider the resilience of rebuilding after hurricane-related storms, winds and floods in Houston, Florida and Puerto Rico, people looking out for each other, often without federal assistance.

Certainly, we can count on the robustness of the human spirit to be resourceful and generative in the most difficult and daunting of circumstances. I celebrate the rays of hope in the long days of night right after the Winter Solstice.

Scriptures teach us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Much in our consumeristic and individualistic society leads us to act contrary to this principle. We see the effects and impacts before us. The original sin of racism and the modern-day idolatries of unaccountable power, hero-worship, and tribal identity can corrupt and control our word, thought and lives. Yet, there is a better way, the way of response-able love in community. Faith oriented to mutual liberation and transformation can make a critical difference. Faith-fullness is freeing and life-affirming, and values the gifts, contributions and leadership of others. It is not about me, but we-in-authentic-relationship.

My beginning for this year is two-fold: to “fear not” and behold the awesome power of the others-become-neighbors in our midst; and to trust in the mystery and grandeur of a God who is beyond all understanding, while simultaneously accompanying us with a guiding hand on our shoulder. This God urges us out of the survival mentality of the lifeboat and to the hospitality of the inclusive, dignity-full banquet table. Grateful am I to join you in the struggle.