

Reflection: [“The Longest Night”](#) by Greg Morisse edited by Pastor Peter Paige

When we think of the public image of Christmas, we think of the malls, of Santa Claus and lots of Christmas lights. Everyone is supposed to be smiling, or sitting by a warm fire with hot cider. The glitter and glamour is really meant to distract us from reality— for months now, the nights have been getting longer and the air has been getting colder. Despite the commercials filled with singing and dancing, despite all the red and the green, this isn't always a happy season. *As in our scriptures for today, Christ came at a time it seemed Israel was abandoned. In need of rescue, revival. They were waiting and distraught.*

Advent is a dark time Friday night was the longest of the year. We were moving through a dark tunnel. At times we feel isolated and lonely. With all the trees and lights we're expected to be happy. We're supposed spend all month shopping for gifts, hours preparing food, we travel great distances to be with family. All the malls, and all the Christmas carols all say that this a happy time! But our private Christmas, those feelings we hold inside, aren't always happy. We are afraid to share our pain. We don't think we're allowed to be a downer. And so we walk around, hiding our hurt.

That's what darkness is. Being alone and in pain. When you can't talk about how the holidays are really hard. And that's why we're here. We bring all of ourselves to the table; we bring all of our joy and all of our pain; we bring our complete selves to God. We are here to listen, to lift each other up, and to be in darkness together.

Advent is a dark and lonely time, a waiting time... Waiting and hoping. We wait for something to come along and rescue us from the darkness. We wait for some sense to be made of our suffering and our pain. We wait for something new to happen that will revive and rejuvenate us for another year.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep. I imagine it happened like this: A shepherd has 100 sheep. He spends all day with them; he knows them all by name. One morning he wakes up to find one missing. The shepherd knows exactly which one is missing; it's a small and quiet little sheep that always is at the edge of the herd. The shepherd dashes into the fields and hills to find the lost lamb. The little lamb spent the entire night under a tree, unsure that anyone would ever come looking for him. The shepherd finds the lamb curled up, shivering in the cold and shaking with fear. The shepherd is so happy and relieved; he takes the lamb into his arms. He hugs the lamb and comforts him. And when they return together, the little lamb is very happy to be with his flock again.

We are that lost lamb. Somehow when we weren't paying attention and we got separated from our flock. Whether we are mourning, hiding, suffering from depression or something else altogether, we were lost and scared. In the darkness of night we wonder if anyone is looking for us.

Micah tells us today: And he, who shall come from a small town to rule all of Israel, shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD...And he shall be the one of peace. - Advent is a time of waiting and hoping. We are waiting and hoping in this darkness for Jesus.

There is a shepherd out there anxiously looking for us. And he will not give up looking for us until we are found. That shepherd is Jesus, and he can reach us, he can find us, in whatever darkness we are in. He will find us trapped by our family, and help us through this Christmas. Each of us will, throughout the day, have a quiet moment, when we stop and realize that our loved one is gone, that the special way we used to celebrate has lost its meaning. But we will come back from that quiet and lonely place. Brought back to a family who, still, after all these years is still imperfect, but somehow perfectly loves us.

We celebrate Advent to remember what is important to us, to lift up the pain of darkness, and to remember that there is hope in light. For some of us the candles of joy may not be easy to light. This year peace may not be waiting for us at the end of Advent. For some, the Advent season may take much longer. But there is hope.

The days have already begun to get longer; the light grows, and the dark recedes. With the birth of Jesus, we find a light at the end of the tunnel, a beacon in the darkness. We find a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths. God has not abandoned us in our time of darkness, God has heard our prayers and sent to earth a Son. He shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace.

Our shepherd has found us. We are no longer lost. Like a shepherd, God curls us up into his arms and cradles us, comforts us, reassures us, loves us. God rejoices that we have been found. Our waiting time has been worth it - Thanks be to God.