

Allen Pruitt
Longing for Light in the Darkness
2019

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

The Rev. Brad Rundlett was my supervisor in seminary.
He served the same church in Northern Virginia
for over 20 years,
before his retirement in 2015.

We went to lunch every Sunday after church
at this diner;
you know,
the kind with an impossibly long menu.
He had a reuben.
I had eggs Benedict.

I've lost touch with him over these years.
We talk every couple of years,
for 20 or 30 minutes.

From Brad I learned to pray.
Or better put,
I learned that prayer was worth doing.

I learned about the grace of God
- that it was this relentless thing,
this undeniable thing.

Every time I talked about frustrating God,
or getting in the way of what God might have in store for me,
Brad would look at me across the table and say,
you can't get in the way of God.
Besides,
all God has in store for you is love,
same as the rest of us.

One Sunday after church,
driving to our diner
- it was a tough time for Brad.
Raising teenagers at the time,
a son serving overseas too.
And if I remember,
I think someone had been pretty mean to him at church that day.

He's driving us along this little residential street,
the snow melting on an early March day,
and he slams on the brakes
and pointing into a yard alongside us,
says, Look at the crocus!

And we stopped what we were doing
and we looked.

All purple and white,
 tiny little flowers
 poking themselves up out of the ground like a carpet.

Something bright
 on a dark day.
Something living
 after a long winter.

Look at the crocus!

It blooms first.
 Before the daffodils and the iris.
 Before the forsythia starts putting out yellow.

Look at the crocus!

And every time I do,
 I remember my friend Brad.
 Who told me that God has nothing in store for me
 but love,
 same as the rest of us.

Nothing but love.

It's a hard thing to believe.
 Even when you've got the face of love
 sitting across the table from you;
 even with a plate of eggs Benedict laying before you.
It's a hard thing to believe
 that all God has is love.

We are often invited to believe differently.
We are often invited to believe that God has a grade-book,
and sits behind a desk
like the worst of our middle school teachers.

We are invited to believe that what we do
will somehow change God's opinion of us.
Or worse yet,
we are invited to believe
that what happens to us
is God's way of trying to teach us a lesson.

The only lesson is this:
*All God has in store for you is love,
same as the rest of us.*

This time of year,
it can be hard to remember that.
We've got to show up,
show out,
be there for all of the stuff.

You know what I mean.
You've got your stuff.
I've got mine.

We talk like Christmas is all of the stuff.

Well it's not.

Christmas is not a bunch of presents.

We talk that way sometimes though,
don't we?

Well, money's tight,

so we're going to have less Christmas this year.

Christmas is **not** a bunch of *presents*.

And here's another secret too.

Christmas is **not** a bunch of *presence*.

Like being present.

Christmas is NOT the presence of those we love most.

Sometimes we cannot gather together,

as in golden days of yore,

faithful friends who are dear to us,

gathered near to us once more.

Sometimes it's just not in the cards.

Christmas is not the about the presents you buy
or the presence of those we miss.

It is about one thing only.

The presence of God.

The God who chose to be present with us,

to live with us,

not in our perfectly decorated houses,

full of warmth and light,

but instead, a rather dingy stable,

born to questionable parents,

and with a family tree as full of villains

as it is of heroes.

Same as the rest of us.

I don't know exactly what you need this year.
Likely you don't know either.
Not really.

What I **know**
is that Light shines in the midst of the darkness.

Don't ever let anybody tell you
that the darkness is gone
or can be got rid of.
It's there.

The darkness will always be there.

God's promise
is that the light shines in the midst of the darkness.

God's promise
is that the darkness will never overcome it.

Are you feeling a little lost this year?
Do you not have enough presents under the tree?
Do you wish those you love most could be present with you?
Like things used to be,
or like you *wish* they used to be?
Do you just not know what to do?

That's ok.
None of us do.
Nobody really knows what to do.

So we look.

We look for the crocus.

 blooming late in winter.

We look for the light,

 shining in the darkness.

We look.

We look for those who say to us,

Be strong,

do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
 with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.

And he will.

God will come.

The Light will shine.

The darkness will not overcome it.

God will come
 and find you.

Same as the rest of us.