

Christmastide – Waiting Together by Peter Bankson

December 31, 2017



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Opening

It is not news that we are living through unsettled, troubling times. War and starvation; political and cultural oppression; climate crises; population explosion all contribute to the

rising tide of suffering, for all life and the planet that sustains it. On the surface it seems like everything we value is threatened or coming apart. How can we cope? And how can our faith community help us stand faithfully in this turbulent time?

On this last day of 2023 I'd like to offer a few observations on this, focusing on hope, blessing, and the potential value of community.

A Ladder to the Light

As I started working on what to share this morning, the wisdom of Bishop Steven Charleston fell into my hands. He is a retired Episcopal Bishop of Alaska and Choctaw elder and who offered a homily at the National Cathedral on the first Sunday of Advent. ([The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston – Washington National Cathedral](#)) Thanks to an alert from Brenda, Marjory and I were able to tune in. It was inspiring for me to hear his deep understanding of the common foundation of his Christian and Native American faith.

Then, I was delighted and not surprised, when Santa left me two of Bishop Charleston's books under our Christmas Tree: *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*, and *Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage*.

Reading about the Ladder of Light as I sat with our scripture lessons for this week gave me some fresh ideas about Seekers Church as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and wait for good news to sprout from the mud in these troubled times.

Bishop Charleston calls us to action. From his Native American perspective, he sees these days as a time in the dark interior of the "kiva," a sacred space for ritual rebirth, where new understanding and recommitment can grow out of the painful

unknown. He says:

It is a symbol for our shared future. It tells us that if we're in a time of darkness, we need not be afraid of it, because it is only the beginning for us. In other words: we have been down this spiritual road before. The kiva tells us we have been through this process of birth and rebirth more than once. As a people, we have entered into darkness before, only to emerge into light.

Ladder to the Light, p3.

Bishop Charleston reminds us that the only way to get out of the kiva is to climb the ladder into the light. He describes that "ladder to the light" as having eight rungs, each of which represents an important element in supporting our faith journey, out of the darkness of chaos and despair into a new season of opportunity and hope. Here are the "rungs" of renewal he describes: Faith, Blessing, Hope, Community, Action, Truth, Renewal and Transformation.

I think each rung is worth our attention, but I don't have the time, or the mental capacity, to dig into each of them here. The book might be fuel for a class in our School for Christian Growth, though. Today I'd like to offer a few reflections on three of the "rungs" in Bishop Charleston's Ladder to the Light: community, blessing and hope.

1. Community: Waiting for the Light Together

At Seekers we are committed to being a creative and inclusive community as we work for peace and justice. This is the opposite of so much we see around us, including the recent legal actions against restorative affirmative action as well as violent racism at many, many levels.

Over the past 48 years we have worked to stand together as we support one another planting and weeding the seeds of peace and justice at any level within our reach. It's been a commitment to community – standing together – working to include all even when we feel hurt and can't agree.

Nurturing the seeds of just hope in different seasons involves more than harvesting the fruit. Just now we seem to be waiting in the dark, seeds planted, perhaps, but only sketchy signs of sprouting hope.

Since we began as a separate family of faith following Jesus on the Way we've been committed to supporting each other as we seek God's call on our lives. Our call as a church says:

Our call is to be a "Seekers community" which comes together in weekly worship rooted in the Biblical faith, with shared leadership; and disperses with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives. ... For us, Christian servanthood is based on empowering others within the normal structures of our daily lives (work; family and primary relationships; and citizenship) as well as through special structures for service and witness.