

**Advent 3B: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thess. 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28**

Once upon a time, Ronald and Virginia had an idea. They thought and talked about the idea for ten-plus years. They shared the idea, trying to invite others into making it happen, but the people they had talked to about it shook their heads and said it really wouldn't work. It couldn't work. So Ronald and Virginia didn't tell anyone that they were going to go ahead with it—that they had gone ahead with it, putting their idea into action—until they decided which day was going to be *the day*. So it wasn't until the day before that they alerted the neighbors to expect big crowds. And they tested all of the equipment one more time, just to make sure it worked. The next day, *the day*, they met at a small section of the border wall that separates Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas\*, and installed three bright pink teeter totters that poked through the wall for children on both sides to play on.

Kids came running and hopped on the teeter totters, eager to join with new playmates. Agents on both sides of the border were there within minutes, to find out what was going on. But when they saw the teeter totters, they smiled and stuck around to watch and take pictures. People of all ages took turns going up and down, enjoying the instant connection with the person on the other end. The architect (Ronald Rael) and designer (Virginia San Fratello) knew it would be mostly mothers who came with their children to this pop-up park, so they had painted the long beams pink: not because women like pink, but because pink is symbolic, in Juarez, as a sign of awareness of and resistance to violence against women. It was an acknowledgement, a witness, to those present that others stood with them. That they weren't alone.

When Ronald, the architect, later watched footage from the drones that recorded this pop-up, temporary playground, he realized the three short pink lines running perpendicular to the long wall looked like a few stitches or sutures, bringing together a long, winding wound, so that it could begin to heal. Afterwards, he said that he began to imagine other ways to reach across the border, to extend friendship and build relationships. While the division and heartache of that border were not changed forever, those pink teeter totters joyously proclaimed, **What you see is not all that is!** Now, *anything* that happened pre-pandemic sometimes can seem to have taken place in another time, long, long ago, but this happened just a little over four years ago, in July 2019. And while it took place on a small stretch of the U.S-Mexican border, it's not really a story about just that border.

Once upon a time, there was a messenger, who told of One who was coming into the world. His name was John the Baptist and every year at this time of year we hear the story of his cries, as they cut across the borders of time. He spoke of the One who was / is coming in a wild and outrageous way, perhaps like a pink teeter totter, piercing the border between the wilderness and acceptable society, between outsiders and insiders, between the excluded and included, between who people expected God to be and the God he told them to expect. **What you see is not all that is and will be.** Or maybe he is more like an old-fashioned newspaper delivery person, riding by on a bicycle, delivering daily news from the Kingdom of God with a quick flick of the wrist, straight to your doorstep. With tall, bold headlines that say: *I, your God, love justice...I have made*

*an everlasting covenant with you.* Crazy. Unexpected. Unbelievable news piercing through the night. The stuff that people might say only belongs in the tabloids. John the Baptist pokes at and through the borders between this world and that kingdom all the time, a non-stop messenger pointing towards God, still trying to get us to see what he is seeing. Understand what he understands. **What you see is not all there is.**

Once upon a time, a friend of mine, inclined to pondering theological and spiritual matters, said to me, *You know, every year I hear the promise of this season, but I struggle. I don't know if I expect anymore that peace and love will really ever come into this world.* Another friend described this separation in a different way. He said, *Even though I know that after the winter solstice, the days will start to get longer, every year I doubt whether or not the warm sun will ever come again.* These are border stories, too, of standing on one side, not being able to see through or over the barriers. Advent puts in stark relief the border between the now that we live in and all that is part of God's dream and kingdom that have not yet been fully realized. Sometimes the separation or gap between this world and that world feel even more impenetrable at this time of year. The Sunday morning readings don't always inspire us to see God as playful. But today, on this third Sunday of Advent, also known as *Gaudate* Sunday—or Rejoice Sunday—we light a candle for joy. On many Advent wreaths, the candle for this third Sunday and third week in Advent is pink. Pink for joy. Pink for playfulness. Pink for laughter. (Did you hear the laughter in Psalm 126, verse 2?) Pink for teeter totters, which were also pink as a message to the women that they were not alone in their stance for justice and peace. So, pink for justice. Pink for peace. All parts of pink are essential. The pink Advent wreath candle does not stand for joy because there is no more violence or despair in this world. We're not called to deny or diminish the impact of what we see. Isaiah tells it like it is: all around, people are struggling. But...*I, your God love justice.* So hear this: the oppressed will be freed; the brokenhearted will be tenderly held; the captives will know liberty; the prisoners will be released. Like the pink teeter totters, the pink candle is a message, a proclamation that even, or especially, where there has been or is violence or war or despair, there is Emmanuel, God-with-us. *Peace birthed from the depths of violence is a holy child indeed, because violence begets violence. Come, God our great midwife in the midst of our world's birth pangs and labored groans for renewal. Come, help us birth a new world. Come Holy Child.* (David Henson) For those who are wondering and waiting and uncertain and skeptical and tired, **What you see is not all there is.**

Today, it seems to me that God is on one side of the pink teeter totter, brightly calling us to hop on the other end, breaking into our consciousness and hearts unexpectedly, Where in this world might people be in need of a pink teeter totter poking through a barrier. Who might be yearning to see the small flame of a pink candle piercing the impenetrable and cold night sky? Who needs to know that they are loved right now? Like John the Baptist, that's the message we, too, are called to spread: **What you see is not all there is, for I, God, love justice. And I, God, love you.**

*\*In the sermon, I said that it took place on the border between Mexico and New Mexico. Thank you to the Rev. Dr. Erika Marksbury, from whom I heard of this pop-up event in 2019.*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReTAHUHHxIk>