

December 21st

Titus 3:4-7

Sara Gannon

In recent years "In the Bleak Midwinter" has become one of my favorite Christmas hymns. I don't remember singing it while growing up –maybe because despite its beautiful melody by Gustav Holst, it seemed a bit stark next to the great celebratory carols such as "Joy to the World" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Poet, Christina Rossetti's first stanza sets a sorrowful tone:

*In the Bleak Midwinter, frosty wind made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

Though this wintry setting is probably inspired more by Rossetti's England than ancient Palestine, the bleakness and frozen scene resonates metaphorically with the hopelessness and heaviness of the immovable and oppressive occupation of one's homeland, the setting into which Christ was born. In the middle verses Rossetti marvels that despite the vastness and grandeur of the Creator, God appears most clearly in a mother's kiss of a child born in poverty.

Sometimes the climate crisis seems so immense and unchangeable like the heaviness and coldness of a deep, dark winter. And yet it is exactly in the dark, dead places in which the Spirit of God surprises us with life and light and love. In the last verse, the author ponders her part in the story.

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wiseman, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

***Kind Creator,
I give you my heart. Lead me to what is mine to do. Amen.***

Action Item:

Take a walk in the cold on this Winter Solstice consenting to God's work within and through you.

Rosetti, Christina (text) and Holst, Gustav (music). "In the Bleak Midwinter." Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal. (2013). Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press. p. 144.