

“Seeing It”

Advent 1 2023

I’m addicted to Wordle.

Also Connections.

And, to a lesser extent, the mini crossword, but I don’t feel a sense of loss if I miss a few days.

But Connections? Wordle? Gotta get them done each day.

If you have no idea what I’m talking about,

that’s a probably a good thing –

it means that you are not twisting your brain up in knots each day like I am.

Wordle and Connections come to us each day courtesy of the New York Times word games department,

a department that I picture as being populated by a whole bunch of Yoda-like creatures,

brilliant and wise, and completely messing with our minds all the time.

Wordle is a pretty simple concept for a game, really –

you have six chances to guess a five letter word.

Simple concept, yes, but frequently maddening, especially if you get trapped in the spiral of seemingly endless possibilities.

Like when you type in bully and it tells you that you got the ‘ully’ part right and you then discover just how many words end in ully.

Fully! Gully! Dully!

Whoops, you’re outta chances, it was Sully.

What’s most frustrating is when you’re staring at a pattern of letters that you know, you *know* cannot actually be a word.

Like Q blank E blank E.

I stared at that for an hour. I was down to my last guess, and I couldn’t see it.

Q blank E blank E.

Think about it, I'll circle back in a moment.

The other game I'm addicted to is this new one, Connections, and this one is definitely created by an evil genius.

It's sixteen words that you have to sort into four groups of four ... so you have to discern four patterns, four connections, at work.

But each of the words could connect a couple different ways – does Apple go with Banana or does it go with Dell 'cause they're computers, or does Dell belong with Valley, as in the Farmer in the Dell ..

And again, sometimes you just can't see it.

You just can't see the pattern.

Like one the other day that was Faucet, Candidate, Mascara and Nose.

How are *they* connected?

Well, they are all things that *run*.

Didn't see it.

And, by the way, Q blank E blank E, that was QUEUE – you probably saw it. I never did.

Here's why I'm talking about frustrating puzzles.

Here's why I'm talking about things that you just can't see until somebody else says, "look! look at it *this way*."

Because it seems to me that Advent -- this season we enter into today -- *Advent* is the time when we are shown the answer to the puzzle, the puzzle we just can't do on our own.

Advent is when a voice from beyond us says "look at this way, my friend. *Now* do you see it?"

That beautiful passage that Brian just read to us was written by the prophet Isaiah long years ago.

And in that passage you hear God speaking through Isaiah to us, to each of us,

You hear God saying "look at it this way. This is how it's supposed to go.

Here is the answer, here are the missing pieces,
here's the pattern that you haven't been able to see."

Isaiah writes this:

"In days to come people will say, "Come, let us go up to the Lord...
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."
And the people shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more."

Isaiah, like us, was living in a time when things were not right,
when things were really rough;
when there was constant strife,
and the money that kings could have spent on the poor was spent on war,
and people were hurting.
And Isaiah could see the answer,
he could see how the pieces were *meant* to fit together
so that God's world would be as it was created to be.

So Isaiah said to his people,
"Look, look, here's here's what God designed for us.
This is what it's supposed to look like:
a world where all God's people have beaten their swords into plows,
and their spears into pruning hooks.
A world where we learn war no more."

Can you see it? Isaiah was saying, *can you see it now?*
This is the answer that was eluding you,
this is what the Creator intended for you to figure out.
This is what you're supposed to see:
That we're *all* connected.

That we were created to live in peace.

Advent is, to me, that time when we all, collectively,
are asked to pause,
and step back from the puzzle, and clear our eyes.
So that we can see it. So that we can see how things are really meant to be.
Advent is when we let our vision be re-set,
when we allow God to show us what the answers are.
The answers that our world needs, yes,
but also the answers that each one of us needs
for peace within our hearts, for assurance, love and hope.
In Advent, we take a breath,
we let go of trying to figure it out by ourselves,
and we listen for God saying to us “see it? can you see it?
can you see what my eyes see?”

Earlier this week,
a friend in the church sent me a link to a podcast,
a podcast I’d never heard of, called “Ten Percent Happier.”
And this particular episode was an interview with a remarkable Jesuit priest
in Los Angeles, Father Greg Boyle.
“You have to listen to this interview,” my friend said -- and so I did.
Father Boyle has been working with gang members in LA for almost 40
years,
and the people he has worked with are those whom others
could see no value in,
no possibility for change or redemption.
And with those people that everyone else has turned away from,
Father Boyle has created the world’s largest program for rehabilitation and
re-entry of gang members,
and has shown countless numbers of people a way out of darkness and into
God’s own light.

Father Boyle's ability to transform lives has been remarkable.

And what Father Boyle said in this interview was that the heart of the work he does with gang members is simply to get them, he said, "*to where they see themselves as God sees them.*"

To help them see what God sees.

And then, he said, to help them see each other in the same way, with an openhearted expansive spacious loving heart.

Life, Father Boyle says, is removing the blindfold.

Once the blindfold falls, we see what God sees:

that we are all unshakably good and that we belong to each other.

One of the most poignant stories he told was of a young woman who had worked with the program some time,

but was still struggling to believe in her own worth.

And she came to Father Boyle one day with tears in her eyes and said "I wish **you** were God."

And when he laughed and said 'why, Nelly?' she said "because I think you'd let me into heaven."

"And that broke my heart completely in two," Father Boyle said, "that she thought God would reject her.

And I said to her, "Nelly if I get to heaven and you're not there I'm not staying."

"No one," he said to the interviewer, "no one will ever dissuade me from the God who wants to welcome Nelly."

What Father Boyle does, over and over again, is to let people know that they are abundantly loved by the God who created them.

What Father Boyle does, in other words, is to help people see the answer they could not see by themselves.

To help them see what *could* be, what God created them to be.

Advent is meant to be that time when we allow God to show us the answer,
to see ourselves and all creation as God intended it.

To see ourselves as God sees us,
and to see our world as it could be.
To see it.

In Advent, we remember that we live in the not-yet time.

The word Advent means simply "it's coming,"
and in this season we remember that the world as God intended is still to
come.

In Advent we are called to pray for that world,
In Advent, we are called to work for that world.
But before that, before we can do that,
we have to be able to see it.

We have to be willing to let God show it to us.

Let God show us a vision of a world in which
nations shall learn war no more.

A world in which, yes, every child will be loved,
every one shall live, as the Bible says, 'neath their vine and fig tree.

We can't work toward it until we picture it --
we have to open our eyes to what God is showing us
in order to start living toward it.

This Sunday, this first Sunday in Advent,
is the Sunday of Hope.

We begin this season in hope.

Hope that finds its strength in the vision of what can be.

Our hope is fueled by what is yet promised:

a world in which the pieces fall into place,

a world in which we see one another as God sees each of us,

a world where the connections finally make sense.

A world where the words we were seeking are found:

Hope, faith and love.

A world that a baby born in Bethlehem came to show us.

Amen.