

## **Sermon: Winter's Quiet (service leader)**

I've had a penpal for nearly fifteen years. The fact that we've managed it this long is still somewhat of a shock to us both - letter writing is so slow. But the richness of something so slow and intentional has made someone I met a long time ago become one of my dearest friends.

Sarah and I met the summer that I graduated from college. I had moved to the Cape to live with my sister in our grandparents house while I figured out what came after college. Sarah was entering her final year at Vanderbilt college and we had both gotten summer jobs at Jo Mama's New York Bagel in Orleans - some of you have probably been there. I distinctly remember meeting Sarah while she was portioning out sandwich turkey and immediately wanting to be her friend.

Sarah went back to school in the fall and I moved to San Francisco and somehow we decided to be penpals. We both love tiny precious things and the magic of a practice that's become somewhat outdated. The remarkable thing is we essentially only communicate through letters. We usually see each other once a year or so, but otherwise there is no immediacy, no chatter of text or social media, only letters.

And while Sarah opens my letters the moment she receives one and then takes her time writing back, I hold on to her letters for weeks, sometimes months, savoring the fact of having a new letter, and then I write a response as soon as I've read her letter.

It's incredibly slow, this friendship by letter, it's silent and it's tactile, but somehow in that potent slowness there's incredible richness.

It's the same quiet magic as waking up to the first glittering snowfall. Like time has slowed down, inviting the world to rest for a moment, inviting us to bask in sensory magic.

Humans have added a great deal of festive bustling-about to this winter season. But nature slows down in the winter. Animals hunker down in their winter warmth, the trees shed their leaves and flowers pause their blooming.

We ask so much of ourselves this time of year as we try to keep up with the pressures of the holiday season. That's a big task under the best of circumstances and it only becomes harder when we're experiencing loss or loneliness or overwhelm, betrayal or illness or all manner of suffering.

Or maybe the season of your own life has slowed and there isn't the holiday bustle of the past. That, too, can bring its own kind of grief.

It's okay to let it be messy or imperfect or disappointing. The first part of compassion and self-compassion is letting what's true be true.

Last week we practiced skills for self-compassion, which I encourage us all to employ. That turning towards our own truth with kindness. Remembering that struggle and overwhelm and fragile hope are all part of the human experience - you're not alone. And letting it be as it is wrapped in our own care.

There is richness that can be found in the slow quiet of winter and letter writing - in the experience of being fully immersed in the moment.

And maybe that kind of quiet time is elusive in this season of your life - there is too much to do, too many demands on your energy, too many people needing your care. That's okay. Maybe just leave the door open to the slow quiet, notice the moments when it enters and take a breath to savor those little bits of peace.

This is the first Sunday of Advent, the season of waiting in the Christian calendar that leads up to Christmas. It's an in-between time, a time of the not yet. I know many of us have had the experience of waiting for a baby to be born. Even if we're not the ones doing the birthing, the waiting warps time. We sit in the paradox of both urgency and endless waiting.

So in this season of slowing down and bustling about, of festivity and amplified pain, I invite you to make a little space for the slow quiet. Invite in a little more intention. Let it be messy. Those imperfect moments of true presence might become the most treasured memories.

It's remarkable to me how profound something as simple as a letter to a friend can be, especially when practiced year after year. What practices in your life invite you into the rich quiet? What practices help you to slow down enough to notice some thing of wonder, to be fully present?

What practice of slow quiet, what richness or connection can you invite in during this season? Maybe it's a letter to an old dear friend. Maybe it's some gentle stretching before bed. Maybe it's going for a walk every day and noticing, really paying attention.

Whatever it is, I hope you make space for moments of slow quiet this season.

Amen.