

**December 21, 2019 The Longest Night**  
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I had a reputation for a long time...among my friends. I was always the one with the giant purse full of whatever magical solution might be needed to any given emergency. Ever since high school, I was your girl for that kind of thing.

Band-aid? Got it. Advil? Needle and thread? Permanent marker? Hair tie? I even carried hair ties when I had a pixie cut.

I joke sometimes that I would have been a great boy scout - in that I do fashion my life by the motto "be prepared." (And I guess if I was that age these days...I could have actually been one...)

There is another side of that coin, of course. There's always another side. Because...everywhere I go, I tend to be weighed down by a shoulder full of bags...

I bring my supplies and my work everywhere...my computer...usually an extra canvas bag or two for overflow...

I'm lucky not to have needed rotator cuff surgery already.

Trying to have everything, everywhere...to always be ready...to always be able to meet the needs of everyone...is...it's impossible, right?

And, of course...over time... I have realized that I am not magical...that, of course, we can't always be ready to solve whatever problem will come up. My bags of tricks are not insurance against every contingency...Sometimes we don't realize how heavy it is to carry around our false sense of security...at least not until it gets shattered by something beyond our control.

This season of the year, Advent, is often described as being a season of preparing...but for me it is also a season of knowing I cannot be prepared.

There is too much beyond my control. And what did I possibly think I could have in my purse that the Lord of the Universe would need when he came to the door?

This is the longest night of the year, and there is not a single thing any of us can do to make the axis of the earth tilt back towards the sun and the warmth...the lengthening of days...These times are so cosmic in scope. They remind us how small we are...in case we needed any reminding.

I don't know what you carry with you ...what weighs you down in this season...Perhaps it is a sense of obligation...or putting on the face and show that seems expected now. Maybe there are people who you end up around at this time of year who you have to perform for, in one way or another. You carry your bag of tricks...the stories, disguises and slight of hand that help hide the parts of you that aren't safe around them.

Or maybe it isn't the weight you carry now that hurts...but it's the phantom pain of what is missing. Sometimes it is not that we are carrying so much...but that the things we have carried and the people we have loved are gone.

And we feel so much more keenly how we are not whole anymore.

We are weary...weary of carrying too much...weary of the emptiness of the lives we live too much alone.

And to this Jesus says, "Come to me, you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

I saw a post online this week talking about these verses from Matthew. It said, "Jesus didn't say, 'Come to me all you who are crushing it, living your best life, and I will give you rest.' He said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.' If you're discouraged, tired, or weary, don't worry. That's exactly how Jesus expected you to come to him." (@lukelezon)

Jesus isn't coming expecting you have to a faultless home and TV ready family...a perfect meal, a pet-hair-free sofa...a life ready to pitch to the

Hallmark channel. Jesus is coming to the world precisely because he knows all we can do, metaphorically (or maybe not even just metaphorically) is answer the door in our pajamas...gesture him in silently and then crumple back into the couch...shoving the pizza boxes over to make enough room for him to sit down, too.

If that's not how it was, he wouldn't have needed to come. I mean, don't get me wrong, he would have wanted to. He would have come over for any occasion. He's crazy about you. I don't know if you know that. He'd drive 45 minutes just because you said you needed a hug...45 minutes plus breaking into the space-time continuum...just to give you a hug. For real.

It is the Longest Night of the year...so if you need rest...the whole solar system is conspiring to tell you it's ok to rest.

We talk about the darkness like it's a thing we need to escape. And...sometimes it is. But sometimes, it comes to us and stretches itself out and offers us rest. Jesus doesn't just come to us at the darkest moment of the year to be the light that sends the darkness running. He comes in the midst of darkness to offer the gifts that darkness holds.

So if the sparkle and glitter and shimmer hurt your eyes...of the jingling and jangling of the carols clench your chest...you are allowed to stay here wrapped up in darkness. Jesus comes here, too. Jesus comes here, especially.

Jesus will sit in the living room with us with the lights off...surrounded by empty pizza boxes...and just put an arm around us while we cry or until we can sleep.

Whatever you are carrying...whatever you are missing...whatever you can do...and whatever you can't...no matter how prepared or not...

Jesus is coming close. And you don't have to be anywhere other than exactly where you are. Because exactly where you are is exactly where he wants to be. Because he wants to be with you. For real.

May you feel the presence of the One who is coming - in the darkness and in the light...tonight...and always.

Peace to you.

Amen.