

## The Third Sunday in Advent

December 16, 2018

### Philippians 4:4-7



4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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### A reflection from Cathy Chang, mission co-worker serving in the Philippines

What does peace sound like to the prisoner who writes about it? For the prisoner whose time stretches from months into years, one wonders if there are words of peace in thoughts, prayers and words exchanged between fellow prisoners and few visitors.

Even though he was imprisoned in Rome, the apostle Paul penned words about peace with gratitude to the believers in Philippi. Due to internal conflicts and external threats, this community struggled to stay together and dwell in unity. This community needed to be released from their anxieties and concerns so they could be free to care for one another. Despite his imprisonment, Paul exhorted the believers to share in joy and gratitude and peace with God and with one another.

From the apostle Paul who was in and out of prison, to Mary Jane Veloso who is still in prison and on death row for very different reasons, let us open ourselves up to their language of peace with gratitude. Mary Jane wrote a poem in mid-September (see the below) when a small group of supporters visited her in an Indonesian prison. Eight years ago, Mary Jane was apprehended for heroin in her luggage while traveling to a job promised by her recruiters. Her only job was to serve as a drug mule, because there was no real job to serve as a domestic worker. Her recruiters are in jail and on trial in the Philippines, while she languishes in prison in Indonesia. Her deposition has yet to be received and included in the ongoing trial in the Philippines.

While her trial and her imprisonment could have long removed any words about peace and gratitude, Mary Jane still speaks with hope. After hearing and speaking with Mary Jane, Glorene Dass later wrote about their hour-long visit: "There was a moment when [Mary Jane] uttered, "I am alive because of each one of you, and I know I will be out one day. I have such great hope for freedom."

Those words staggered me, and a deep sense of responsibility grew within me to work towards her release and freedom one day. Her presence and willpower gave me hope and

empowerment. In fact, she is a perfect example of how pain can be turned into empowerment for the good of all, even if there are uncertainties."

Let us listen and learn anew about peace from historical and contemporary prisoners during this Advent season. Peace with God and with one another still must be lived out and shared in community with other people. Peace can still be found in people and places where justice seems lacking. Peace still urges us to speak and act with gratitude.

# A SPARK OF HOPE\*

With each passing day I endure  
The pain that I go through.  
Where is the stillness of my heart?  
Where is the peace in my soul?  
Where is the joy that always fill my life?

Gone. Completely gone.

Frustration and helplessness disturb my heart and mind.  
Yet a spark of hope began to grow the moment I met you.  
Calmness and peace I feel again.  
You are my close friend and teacher.  
From you I learned much and in you I put my trust.  
Through you I value what it means to be alive.

The prison cell serves as my school grounds,  
Teaching me to always be grateful,  
To think optimistically and keep working within restricted space.

A spark of hope fills my heart,  
Growing a new hope.  
A hope that one day freedom and justice  
will take me out of this prison cell.

I welcome that new hope,  
A spark of hope for my sake.

*Mary Jane*

\* Mary Jane wrote this poem in Bahasa and recited it to her prison visitors (family and supporters) on September 14, 2018