

Words of Hope – Isaiah 65: 25-35

God of Hope, open our ears to hear you and our hearts to love you so that our lives might be guided by your ways. Amen

Over the past couple of weeks we have reflected on war, those who fought, those who are fighting still and the innocent victims, namely children, who suffer because the leaders and adults in our world can't get their act together enough to actually care for one another instead of themselves and their own self interests.

It's a rather depressing, heart wrenching, sense of hopelessness kind of time in our world.

The same can be said for the ancient Israelites who are hearing the words from our Isaiah text for the first time.

These are a people who have suffered greatly. They have gone to battle, lost everything, been held captive and exiled in foreign lands.

They prayed, for years they prayed to be returned to their beloved Jerusalem, to the temple and to the way of life they once had. But even after they are given permission to return home, only a few do so.

And those that do face nearly insurmountable obstacles. They are in a desperate situation. "Not only are the economic and social conditions difficult, they begin to face a theological crisis as well.

The prophets had all promised a new day and a glorious future after exile;ⁱ and since God has seen to their return, they expect God to restore their glorious kingdom, as it was under King David.

But 20 years have past and the city of Jerusalem is still in ruins, the temple, destroyed in battles, is still a heap of rubble and the people are despairing.ⁱⁱ Where is the kingdom they have been praying for? Where is God? What is to become of them?

They have no reason to hope, no reason to think that life is going to turn around for them. So, to hear this proclamation from the prophet, Isaiah, must sound hollow to their ears. Kind of like it does to ours!

New heavens? New earth? Jerusalem a joy, its people a delight? It's almost 2020 and we're still waiting God!!

No more weeping or cries of distress? Long lives? Prosperity? A kingdom of peace, compassion and love?

Where?! When?! Sounds like a bunch of rubbish to me! No wonder people claim there is no God! All these words and no action!

And the people of God cry "How long oh Lord, how long?! How long must we wait; wait for you to bring about this future filled with hope?"

What an appropriate text for this, the last Sunday of the Christian year. "Forget the past" God says. "Don't worry about what has gone before. Something new is about to happen."

And even in the midst of our human doubt, these words are as hopeful to us today as they were to the Israelites 2500 or so years ago.

So we prepare ourselves for the waiting. Waiting for the coming of God's kindom and the one who will lead us there.

It is, indeed, a time of new beginnings; new opportunities; new hope. The birth of the Blessed One promises us that.

So, we release the past into our fond and not so fond memories and wait; and in this time of releasing and waiting, there are a few things we need to consider:

1. God's time is NOT our time. When our scriptures proclaim, "God is about to create new heavens and a new earth", that "about to", doesn't mean in the next few hours, days or even years.

But that doesn't mean God isn't active in the world. It doesn't mean that God doesn't exist or even worse, doesn't care.

2. The second thing to consider, is how DOES God act in the world? For the Israelites, within their realm of understanding, God was either for ya or ag'in ya! If bad things happened it was because God was angry with you. If good things happened, it was a sign that everything was right between you and God.

In this 21st century, we understand things differently. We understand, at least to some extent, cause and effect, laws of nature, and scientific findings on how and why the world, and people, function as they do.

These advancements in understanding help us also, to better understand God and how God acts in the world.

We know, for example, that natural disasters are not a result of God's wrath.

But the way in which people rally to support victims of such disasters,... that's God working in and through them, active, alive and bringing hope to the world.

Similarly, illness, death, homelessness, loss of jobs, hunger, poverty ... all those malaises of our society that have been around since the beginning of time, are not because we, as individuals, are not right with God. They are symptoms of an unwell society.

However, the people that reach out, support, care for and encourage others in these difficult times? That's where we see God active, alive and bringing hope to the world.

3. Next week we begin the waiting season of Advent. But what, exactly, are we waiting for? A baby? A Holy Child? Why?

What makes him so special, worthy to be praised? What does he do that makes him any different than any of the other prophets that came before or after him?

For me, it's not a matter of how he came into this world, whether it was a virgin birth or not; if he was born in a stable or if there were angels or shepherds or wise ones. It's not even a matter of the parables and words of wisdom he shared when he grew up.

For me, what makes Jesus special, worthy of our praise, is the life he lived, the actions he took, the way in which he wasn't afraid to stand up for what he saw and knew to be wrong. It's the way he treated everyone with care and compassion. The way he named every person as beloved.

For me, what makes Jesus worthy of our praise and worship is that he showed us, in every way possible, that it is up to us, to make the words from Isaiah a reality.

For 2500 years we have been waiting for God to create new heavens and a new earth, not realizing or perhaps not wanting to acknowledge, that it is only by allowing ... daring to let God work through us that this will ever come to be.

We sometimes speak of Jesus as The Word Made Flesh. Think about this metaphor for a moment. The Word Made Flesh. God's word, God's promise, in the flesh. A living example of God's kingdom of peace, joy and justice.

A living example. Someone to emulate. Not so that we might one day sit at the right hand of God, but so that we might be God's right and left hands, living in a way that will bring about this amazing, hope-filled world we hear about in today's text.

Friends, we know too much to think that God is going to wiggle a magical nose or wave a holy arm over the world and make all things right.

We know, that isn't how this works. We can sit around and bemoan the atrocities of this world. We can shrug our shoulders in defeat. We can turn a deaf ear to prejudices of all kinds. We can go about living our lives, ignoring all that's wrong in the world, as long as it doesn't impact our little worlds.

Or, we can do as Gandhi suggests and "Be the change you want to see in the world."

Seek justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God as you are led by the Spirit to live as Jesus lived; to be God's word made flesh.

Don't wait. The time is now. The opportunities are in front of us and God's proclamation is before us. God is about to create new heavens and a new earth, come join the revolution! Amen!

ⁱ Bratcher, Dennis, Copyright © 2018

<http://www.crivoice.org/lectionary/YearC/Cproper28ot.html>

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ⁱⁱ Bratcher, Dennis. *ibid*