

HOLY WAITING

A Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent, Dec 3, 2017

St Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

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ISAIAH CRIES OUT

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

Take that, Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump; Robert Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, ISIS leaders and recruiters, countless celebrities including Harvey Weinstein, those who prey on indigenous women, and an endless list of war criminals, despots and economic thieves. The prophet knows that the threshold between heaven and earth is thin, and that justice is nigh; God is invited to enter the fray and make things right again; sadly, we know neither God's timing or strategy. We know however God's anger, because it is like ours.

Our anger points to God; at other times, as above, to public figures or heads of state like the confusing or confused Aung San Suu Kyi. Sometimes we blame and indict each other, or global structures like the World Bank, or Church leaders. In our frustration, we can become paralysed by fear and anger or tremendous sadness. Some of us run directly into the struggle; others flee for good reason.

It's hard to hold together two very different realities. We hope for better times meted out by a loving God; simultaneously we live with a miserable assessment of the way things really are for so, so many on earth . . . and possibly ourselves. The prophets however give us other language. Amongst the language of lament come words of assurance and hope:

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.

And

O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

FAITHFULNESS – A Two-Way Street

Take these last words as a personal mantra: “We are ALL your people . . . We are ALL your people.” We are however PEOPLE WHO NEED GOD’S HELP, not only to survive, but to thrive. Paul, writes to the early Church at Corinth:

(Y)ou are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **God is faithful**; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

GOOD NEWS GOSPEL

Can we, dare we, trust in God's faithfulness in us. We usually think of how we sustain and nurture our faith in God. There is a reciprocal relationship promised, again and again. Gospel words describe real life Gospel struggles.

Jesus said, "In those days, after . . . suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Once again, two worlds come together, awkwardly, seeming to promise two different, even contradictory realities. We ask ourselves, which one will overcome or subsume the other? What will God's victory look like? In truth, it's always just out of reach, or that's what it feels like to me sometimes. What then does God's promise look like?

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Gordon (Light) set these words to music, a familiar song in my last parish and in time, here also.

Of that day and hour,
no one on earth can know,
Not even the angels, or the Son:
We cannot be sure,
if the day will be swift or be slow,
But we can be certain that it will come.

Chorus: All will be well, all will be well,
And all manner of things shall be well.
All will be well, all will be well,
And all manner of things shall be well.

To the disturbing prediction of catastrophic physical events, he adds the re-assuring words of Julian of Norwich, “all shall be well” regardless of circumstance. Julian’s particular circumstance referred to sin, from which she received compassionate release and the gift of peace. Our context may be different.

I turn finally to a story, the story of an Anglican priest who recently died, who was wholeheartedly devoted to the study of peace and the practice of peace-making. The Rev. Dr. Don Grayston, an Anglican priest who worked in many different ministries, a teacher of Religious Studies at Simon Fraser University, an activist in the interests of justice and peace, and a long-time student of the life and work of Thomas Merton, he was past president of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada and the International Thomas Merton Society. In notes sent to friends and acquaintances following his funeral I found the following:

Don’s only regret in life was not about an investment opportunity he missed, or a grand home he didn’t live in. Don’s biggest regret in life was that he **didn’t say yes to life more fully.**

In a document called his *Heart Will* Don bequeathed eight insights he gained as he journeyed through life. Here are three for us to consider for ourselves:

- Work with the people who want to work with you.
- Pain is the door to awakening.

- For every stupid statement I made and that I regret, there were ten or a dozen statements I regret not making.

This Advent, I encourage you to take time, find quiet and write down in a journal **what Advent waiting looks like for you**. What is the will, **the longing of your own heart?** Then watch these things come into being as your conversation with God continues.

God bless you, this Advent and always.