Tasting Peace

Isaiah 11:1-10 Kimby Young

Matthew 3:1-6 December 4, 2016

So the passage from Isaiah describes an idyllic time. A time of paradise and peace when enemies live together and even care for each other – the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, the child and the poisonous snake. Everything and everyone will be at peace. This is not realistic; this is not natural; how can this be? Because the earth, all of creation will know God – fully know and experience God. And when you know God, there is no more need for fear or stress or violence or anger or suffering or conflict or separation. When you know God, when you know you are in the presence of God, when you trust God’s promise and provision, we have all that we need. All is right with the world.

Obviously we are not there yet. But Advent is a time when we think about this ideal, when we remember God’s promise of peace – wholeness, fulfillment, perfection, salvation, rightness with God – and when we are challenged to work toward that state of unity with God for ourselves and for all humanity. “Prepare the way of the Lord.” We hear the call down through the ages. How are we called to prepare?

The key to that perfect peace is, of course, in Jesus Christ, the One who’s birth we remember this month, the One who came that we might know God with us, the One who offers salvation as a way of life. The key to God’s perfect peace is in following Jesus Christ, in serving as Jesus served, in loving as Jesus loved. It’s a tall order. As scripture says, “With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” Clearly in the Bible, God favors the weak, the needy, the poor. Clearly in the Bible, God calls those of us who have to help those who have not. Clearly in the Bible, God calls us to help, to love, to care, to share, to offer hope and light wherever we are able. So during Advent – and really always – we think about concrete ways we can show love in the world. We try to make the world a better place. We demonstrate God’s love and tell other people about that love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The promise of Advent is that we are living in two times. Yes, we are living in this world, with its imperfection and pain and loss. We are living in this world where wolves attack lambs, and where lambs do not feel safe around a wolf under any circumstance. Yes, we are living in this world where we sin or face temptation, where we fight or feel offended, where rich get richer and poor … get nothing. Pain is real. Loss is real. Violence is real. Fear is very real.

But Advent reminds us that love is real as well – flesh and blood, bread and cup. We live in a world where Jesus Christ has come and will come again. We live in a world where God’s love can be seen and known and shown. We live in a world where joy is possible and hope is real, where peace can be found or where peace can be and should be created for all.

We live in this in between world – knowing the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, but knowing the darkness as well; experiencing the presence of God with us here and now, but also times of despair and emptiness; receiving the salvation of God in grace made real and yet doubting ourselves and others. How do we live in this in between time? How do we hold on to the love, the light, the presence, the grace, the salvation, the hope, the faith that God has given us?

You hold on, by holding on to Jesus – focusing on God. Again that’s hard to do amid all the distractions of this world, but that is our call. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” Remember that Christ has come and is coming again. Remember and make room for God in your life. Clear away the clutter. And find those glimpses of God’s presence all around you. They are here. They are everywhere. Look for God. Seek God’s kingdom. And you will find it – or better said, you will be found.

Today, in a few minutes, we will share the sacrament of Holy Communion. We will experience a foretaste of God’s kingdom here and now. We will take ordinary elements out of this world – bread and juice, tray and cup – and they will become for us something entirely different than this world. They will be for us the presence of God – the body and blood of Christ. They will remind us that though God is with us everywhere, for us always, we sometimes don’t remember. Though blessings abound in our life wherever we go, we sometimes fail to see them. Though God has given us abilities and opportunities to transform our world by living love and justice, we sometimes forget. As we receive these reminders again, truly receive them as gifts of God’s grace. Receive the promise of God’s presence. Receive the assurance of Christ’s salvation. Receive the empowerment through God’s Spirit. Receive God’s Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and awe of the Lord. Know that you are blessed and that you are able through Christ who strengthens you. You are able, to answer God’s call, to respond to God’s grace by showing and sharing love in the world. You are able to be Christ’s messengers wherever you go – bringing about the peace God has promised. You are able to make peace - wholeness, fulfillment, perfection, salvation, rightness with God. You are able to make a difference in the world and live in God’s kingdom of joy here and now. Further, you are able to invite others into that kingdom of God – to welcome them to Christ’s table, welcome everyone to Christ’s table of mercy and peace.

So what would that look like? To have that taste of heaven here and now. It would be to have a wolf and a lamb in a field together, a leopard and a goat. It would be for you to welcome the outcasts – and not only the “acceptable” outcasts – the poor child, the abused woman, the wounded warrior. God calls us to invite even our enemies to this table of grace, even those whom we cannot stand, even those we fear, even those who put us at risk or our children at risk. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, the toddler will put his hand in the viper’s nest. Oh now, wait a minute. Are we really to welcome those with whom we most vehemently disagree? Are we really meant to make peace?

That is the call of Advent. Not all sweetness and light. We are called to make peace. We’re not called to give in, but to MAKE peace – peace that passes understanding. In the scripture that is judging with righteousness, deciding with equity. Standing by the needy. Standing for the vulnerable. When we do that we welcome the kingdom of God, we usher in the kingdom of God. We no longer live “in between” times. When we welcome all people to God’s table of grace, when we share God’s love faithfully and relentlessly, then it is that we live fully and triumphantly in the kingdom of light. Then it is that we serve Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace. People of Christ, Children of God, prepare the way of the Lord! Amen.