

Hope Can't Wait! Year A: Advent 1

Rev. Ruth Ann Loughry 11/29-30/25

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

This last week, I'm guessing that there were multiple things in our lives that simply couldn't wait.

"The turkey needs to go in now, or it won't be done in time!"

"Black Friday has marked down prices for many of the gifts on my list. I've got to buy them today before the prices go back up!"

"Kids, you have to go to bed now, or you won't enjoy yourselves tomorrow."

In our lives there are things that can wait and things that can't. We've already heard many of them in the liturgy tonight (this morning). In our new Advent liturgy from Sanctified Art, the distinction is made 'What Can't Wait' and what can

wait. Advent is typically a season of waiting for the Christ child to arrive. Yet it's not a season of idle waiting. God didn't wait for wars to end or hunger to end or taxation to cease before God sent Jesus to earth. Neither can we wait for the perfect times. Our Advent waiting is active...an excellent model for faith during the rest of the year. Following the four traditional themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, we'll explore these together.

Last week I was listening to Public Radio. There was an interview with an expert on the work of peace between nations; specifically Ukraine and Russia. The interviewer asked if there was a possibility for peace. The expert said, absolutely! Right this minute, there is a possibility. Always a possibility. But the more relevant question is: is there desirability? Is there a desire? There is always possibility, but only if there is desirability.* I do apologize, I couldn't find the reference when looking for it later.

In the Isaiah text we just heard, the prophet Isaiah envisions a time when implements of war are made into tools for the earth's flourishing. Swords made into plowshares. This would be a radical reforming of not only economic resources, but also earth's resources.

Here's just a little context for the text. These five incredibly hopeful verses are called a 'salvation oracle.' They are sandwiched in between incredibly strong verses of judgement from the Lord. In chapter one, the Lord states God's weariness of religious traditions and festivals. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams...incense is an abomination to me...your appointed festivals my soul hates." (quotes from vs 11, 13, 14)

Then in chapter two, again I quote, "Enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth." (vs 19) The Lord is going to humble the pride of peoples and nations, particularly, Israel and Judah. It won't be pretty.

But Judah contains the city of Jerusalem. Now the Assyrians were the opposing power conquering every smaller nation they possibly could to become a world-wide power. When they reach Jerusalem 700 years before Christ, there is a civil war in Assyria's capital for which the army must return. Jerusalem's inhabitants see this as a miracle, in part due to Isaiah's prayers; a prophet working for Judah's monarchy.

These five verses are an act of divine imagination, looking ‘beyond present dismay through the eyes of God, to see what will be that is not yet.’ⁱ They are filled with hope. The desire for peace isn’t what compels them to lay down weapons of war. It is actually the study of God’s Word: Torah. All nations will come in peace to the place where God is...the temple in Jerusalem. They will learn together. They will work side by side and worship the Lord side by side.

What a picture of hope! All peoples gathered together, doing God’s will and walking in God’s ways! God’s promised day can’t wait! It simply can’t.

Yet...by verse six, humans ways of folly have returned. The Lord is frustrated again. Although God’s ways are not frustrated. Walter Brueggemann says, ‘The poem (oracle) is not an anticipation of triumph for the Jerusalem political-religious establishment. It is the place of God’s presence in the ‘house’, that is, the Temple that is important. God’s presence lives in profound tension with the would-be success of human power..’ⁱⁱ

Did we hear that? What is most important for these nations, is living in God’s presence! Learning of God’s Word! These things simply cannot wait! It is within God’s scope for human living, therein lies our hope.

Where are the connections for us today? God asks us to be light. Light in the darkness can bring hope. Love in the midst of dismay brings hope. Both of which are scriptural.

Thus returning, to the conflicts between Ukraine and Russia. We cannot forget them. We must pray for families who have lost soldiers. God’s powers are greater than humans powers. And, we are called to accompany God’s powers with our actions. What about forgoing a present for that distant cousin, to spend the same amount for hope in Ukraine? Sunflowerseedsukraine.org has lots of projects to give to, all of which bring hope. They are still waiting for their drones to be turned back into sunflower farming equipment. We can help them get there.

The nights are quickly turning colder here in our own community. What will bring hope to families whose budgets are pulled tight? Do you like me, have a few gently used sweatshirts or sweaters that we aren’t using anymore? Stores like habitat restore or goodwill, can get those into the hands of people who need them. We never know how much hope an extra layer of clothing can be on a cold day like today. God calls us to care for the least of God’s people living in our midst.

Finally, what will bring hope to you and your family? Things don't have to stay the same as they are now! We get in a rut and we begin to do the same things every day, our brains on autopilot. Putting up Christmas decorations already gets us out of a rut. Yet more than that, what do you or your family need that will bring about some lasting change? Begin the practice of nightly devotions...or give yourself the gift of an extra payment on that debt which keeps dragging you down...or explore a way to volunteer at church or in town. These things lift your spirits and brings hope to another. Cathy Simmering used to speak about getting rides to dialysis. She talked at length with her drivers. She listened to them. She invited them to church. She told them she would pray for them and their families. It brought hope!

There's some things that can wait. What is God telling us cannot wait this day, so as to bring hope to our world, our community or our families? God didn't wait to send Jesus. We can't wait either. Amen.

ⁱ Brueggemann, Walter. *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV, Year A*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. 2.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.