

**Sermon for 2Advent, Year A – December 8, 2019**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

***Is God's Dream, Our Dream? How Do We Get From Here to There?***

Today is the second Sunday of Advent and we are reminded of the significance of the vocation of the Prophet among God's people throughout all ages. In every age when God's people turn away from God, turning toward sin and the power of evil in the world, human prophets appear to sound warnings of what is to come unless humanity changes its course. These prophets are as diverse as we are. They may be humble, untutored individuals like Amos, the sheep farmer of the eight century B.C., they may be learned public figures like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., they may be teen-age girls like Greta Thunberg, leading the way for climate strikes around the world, or like the Prophets we have before us today: Isaiah and the call to a peaceable kin-dom and the wild and wooly John the Baptist seemingly driven by some inner fire. Overtime, we have lost the biblical meaning of prophecy as we have diminished the power of the prophet and likened the prophetic voice to foretelling the future. However, today we are tutored once again in the biblical charism of the prophet as one who declares God's truth to God's people, speaking as the very voice of God.

This morning, we find ourselves once again on the banks of the Jordan River with this wild and wooly prophet, John the Baptist. All four Gospel writers agree that there is no good news of Jesus to share without the presence of this wild cousin of Jesus. And Jesus himself declares that John is among the greatest of the prophets. So, listen up!

We hear the urgency in John's voice calling for repentance, "... for the kingdom of God has come near." Crowds surround him ... certainly not only because of his wild appearance but also much more so because of the fire and brimstone delivery of his prophetic message. John took his mission which was to declare the imminent arrival of the Messiah, to his very heart. For him as for other faithful Jews, end times were right around the corner. So, the people better listen!

John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg suggest that the biblical understanding of the word, “repent” is deeply shaped by the Jewish experience of exile. To repent, is to return, whole heartedly, to follow the way of the Lord that leads out from bondage and separation toward restoration and reconciliation with our Creator who loves us beyond our understanding. And in our own Outline of the Faith, found in the Book of Common Prayer we find the question: What is the mission of the Church? (p. 855) to be answered ... God’s mission for the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” Reconcilers, as members of Christ’s Body, we, are called to fulfill God’s mission in our own day and time. John’s voice should not be heard as judgment. John’s voice is about an invitation to return home to the very heart of God’s love for all God’s people.

To repent doesn’t simply mean to be sorry. In the Christian scriptures, to repent means to surrender to whole-hearted conversion to living the Way of Jesus, the Way of Love. Not living half-heartedly but whole-heartedly. Just as Rev. Maria Elena challenged us last week with her own prophetic voice, God does not demand perfection, God expects we try harder and harder to be better. To practice the way of love, again, and again, and again. We are the bearers of God’s dream for all creation!

And what is God’s dream for all creation? We are offered an awesome glimpse of God’s dream in the text of the prophet Isaiah. God’s dream is for the world to be a place in which peace, justice, and love – rather than fear, hatred, and judgment are fundamentally available to all creatures, and all creation.

The Divine’s dream is for the world to be a place where we see in one another, without exception, the image and likeness of God; where we human beings live out of the virtue of abundance rather than being driven by scarcity and thereby hoarding for ourselves, the possessions that ultimately lay claim on lives lived in greedy, exclusive, power grabs.

As I have prayed with these lessons, I returned to a prophetic voice, not very well known, from the 1940’s reign of Nazi terror that claimed his life but never diminished his faith and love. His name is Father Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest who was condemned as a traitor for his opposition to Hitler. He wrote this reflection shortly before he was hanged in 1945:

*There is perhaps nothing we modern people need more than to be genuinely shaken up. Where life is firm we need to sense its firmness; and where it is unstable and uncertain and has no basis, we need to know this too... Many of the things that are happening today would never have happened if we had been living in that movement of humility and gratitude before the living God, and looked clearly at things as they really are. ... But we have stood on this earth in false pathos and false security; in our spiritual insanity we really believed we could, with the power of our own hand and arm, bring the stars down from heaven and kindle flames of eternity made in our own sinful image upon the earth. We believed that with our own forces we could avert the dangers and banish the night, switch off and halt the internal quaking of the universe. We believed we could harness everything and fit it into a final order that would stand. Here is the message of Advent: faced with him who is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to false securities and sinful urgings will our eyes begin to see; only then will we be able to guard our life from the fright and terrors of the night. ... It is time to say, "All right, it was night; but let that be over now and let us be ready for the day." If we want to transform life again, our very hearts and souls must be transformed first. If Advent is truly to come again- the Advent of homes and hearts, the Advent of the people and nations, a coming of the Lord in all this – then the great Advent Question for us is whether we come out of these convulsions with determination: yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep. It is time to put things back where God in Jesus Christ placed them. It is time for each of us to go to work, with the same unshakable sureness that the Lord will come, to set our life in God's order wherever we can. Where God's word is heard and God's Word is followed. ( From: Watch For The Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas)*

Are not those words applicable to our world today? And are we not put on notice! These are the words of a true Prophet of God and they should shake every one of us out of our complacency and into a way of life anchored in the love of God in Jesus Christ meant for all God's children and all creation.

The message of this second Sunday of Advent is not only a message of urgency and repentance, it is also balanced by the vision of a peaceable kin-dom in Isaiah's text. This is a vision in which there are no longer victims and victors, but a totally transformed society in which all creatures thrive.

In a world of competition, fear, and an economy of founded on the notion of scarcity, Isaiah envisions a peaceable kin-dom full of astonishing abundance. The lion and bear are grazing now; enough to satisfy a ravenous wolf, and sufficient to embolden the wariest lamb.

Advent reflection and repentance calls us to allow ourselves to be shaped into new creatures; creatures of transformational love. As we ponder the Incarnation, of God made flesh and bone, of Emmanuel, God-with-us, we also prepare for his coming again in glory.

This vision is the Divine's vision; a vision and a kin-dom anchored in peace, justice, and love; a kin-dom where Isaiah and John the Baptist, the prophets of God's vision, are as outrageously different and yet who speak to us with a compelling message of urgency and transformation still so desperately needed in our world today.

Will you listen? Really listen? And then... will you and I dare to give ourselves over to the equally outrageous and transformational work of Divine Love? What then, will be our witness? And how do we get from here to God's vision? How will we get from here to there?

The real urgency and truth doesn't lay in resolving that question... It's so beautifully expressed in Jana's translation of the Lord's prayer:

*Keep us from being captive to fear and open our hearts to Love  
For Love is all there is, the One Song, the Luminous Harmony  
Forever and ever. Amen.*