

Devotions – November 29 – December 5, 2015
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Sunday, November 29, 2015

Text: 2 Kings 23:2 – Josiah’s Reform

²*The king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD.*

The first Sunday of Advent is typically when my family goes on a treasure hunt. We head to the basement and to the garage to look for those illusive red and green storage containers that hold all of the Christmas ornaments and decorations from years past. It’s always amazing to me that no matter how hard we try to keep these containers in a place that we will remember or find easily next year, the Christmas containers get moved or hidden or covered up by other stuff during the year. Then, one by one, the containers make their way to the living room and are opened. Soon, we find our floor covered in Christmas ornaments and lights and with each one comes a story. As we cradle each ornament, we share our thoughts, feelings, and we begin to enter into the Christmas story, our story.

The kings of Judah, prior to Josiah, we are told, neglected the upkeep of the Temple and it had fallen into great disrepair. The kings did what was right in their own eyes and turned away from God for it was easier to worship idols than to follow God’s commands and to trust in God’s provisions. However, King Josiah ordered for work to be done on the Temple in order to repair it. Somehow in that process, the Book had been revealed. So Josiah gathered all the people together to read God’s words and to re-enter God’s story. For a brief time, the people kept God’s word at the center of their lives, sharing the stories of God and God’s people. Eventually, the Book would get put away again, lost as the people of God were scattered into Exile.

Let us Pray: *Holy God, during the busyness of the Advent season, help us to discover your Word and faithfulness in our lives again. Guide us in hearing your story and in engaging it with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Keep your Word at the center of our lives throughout the whole year. In the name of your Son, Jesus, your Word made flesh. Amen.*



Monday, November 30, 2015

Text: 2 Kings 23:22-25 – The Passover Celebrated

²² No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah; ²³ but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem. ²⁴ Moreover Josiah put away the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiah had found in the house of the LORD. ²⁵ Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

Prior to King Josiah, the people of God had forgotten the Passover. They forgot about God and God's presence in their lives. Instead, other things took priority in their lives. Josiah had to remind the people to once again worship God and to keep God at the center of their lives. He even went as far as to remove all the things that would take their focus away from God, the one who set them free.

I wonder what the Advent/Christmas season would look like for my family if we attempted to not have so many presents under the Christmas tree as well as from Santa Claus. In reality, we don't need any more stuff and my children's rooms would certainly be easier to keep clean if we had less stuff. Could we have a Christmas to remember if we gave to ELCA Good Gifts or Lutheran Disaster Response instead of opening all those presents? I remember one Advent season (from Thanksgiving Day to Christmas Day) when we decided to go without television and electronic devices, except for school or work-related functions. People commented on how we were missing out on all the good Christmas movies and shows. Looking back on that time, I remember it fondly. All of the time that we spent playing board games, making crafts, and reading books to each other has become precious. Maybe this year our presents can be gifts of relationship and time with Jesus and with each other.

Let us Pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for your everlasting gifts of grace, love, and mercy. Help us to share those same gifts with all of those that we encounter and with our family and friends. Let us be your hands and feet this Advent/Christmas season and open our hearts to worshipping you fully. Immanuel, in your name. Amen.



Tuesday, December 1, 2015

Text: Isaiah 40:1-2 – Isaiah of the Exile

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.*

² *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.*

While I was in seminary, I learned from my hymnody professor that hymns are sermons, because their words preach the Good News. Even when the scripture text for the day seems to only be about the Law, I am reassured because I know that the hymn of the day will preach the Gospel. Maybe that's why one of my favorite parts about Advent is all of the hymns. It wouldn't be the same without hymns like "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," "Joy to the World," "Prepare the Royal Highway," and "Comfort, Comfort Now My People." These hymns fill my heart with joy, love and anticipation for the birth of the Christ-child. Even when everything seems bleak and gray this time of year, I am lifted up when I sing these hymns.

This passage from Isaiah 40 begins the final prophecies which express hope and consolation that Judah's exile in Babylon is almost over. They are words of comfort that describe a new reign that is about to take place. This new reign occurs in the birth, life, ministry and death of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, who frees us from sin, death, and evil. God heard the cries of the people, heard the voices of injustice and repentance, and so God promised to comfort the people. God's Word became flesh and lived among us in truth and grace. Just like the people of Judah, we, too, are given hope.

Take a moment today and listen to "Comfort, Comfort Now My People." Hear the hope. See God's Word being made flesh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hONtxzbUMhA>

Let us Pray: God of compassion, hear the cries of your people. Call us to repentance and to open our hearts to those who are grieving, suffering, and are broken in spirit. Help us to bring your Word of comfort and hope to those that we encounter today. Lord, we also lift up to you our own anxiety, worries, and heartache. In the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.



Wednesday, December 2, 2015

Text: Isaiah 41:8-10 – Israel Assured of God's Help

⁸ *But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
¹⁰ do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

Whenever I hear the phrase, "Do not be afraid," I think of the angel coming to visit Mary, and later announcing the Good News to the shepherds in the field. So, I wondered, how many times

the phrase, “Do not be afraid” appeared in the Bible. When I “googled” this phrase, I was surprised that there are daily devotional books and calendars that claim 365 scriptural references to this phrase. I also discovered there was debate on the phrasing and word choices such as worry and anxiety in order to make that number reach 365. When I did my own search of the exact phrase, “do not be afraid” in the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), I came up with 78. Regardless of exactly how many times this phrase appears in the Bible, it shows up a lot! “Do not be afraid” is spoken to Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Joshua, King David, Elijah, Zechariah, Mary, the disciples, and to us.

They are words of assurance and hope. They are words that Jesus repeats over and over again. Jesus says in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” He tells us that he is different than the world. The world tells us to be afraid and to live in fear of scarcity that we never have enough. Jesus tells us to live lives filled with his abundance, joy and love, for he has claimed us and named us, Child of God.

Take time today to be still and listen to the hymn, “You Are Mine,” by David Haas:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sgm9lkTNQmc>.

Let us Pray: *Prince of Peace, let our hearts not be troubled or filled with anxiety and worry. Help us to feel your unwavering presence in our lives. Let us be assured of the hope, peace and calmness that you have given to all of your children. Thank you for naming and claiming us in our baptism. In the name of Jesus, hear our prayer. Amen.*



Thursday, December 3, 2015

Text: Isaiah 42:6-7 – The Servant, a Light to the Nations
*I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
7 to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

A light to the nations, a covenant to the people. That is how the LORD through the Prophet Isaiah describes us. How often do we think of ourselves in those terms? Most likely, we hardly ever describe ourselves that way. The Prophet Isaiah is helping God’s people re-imagine their lives in exile. The people have been completely traumatized by seeing their city destroyed, being conquered, and watching as they and their family are killed or are forced to go to a foreign land. And yet, Isaiah tells them that they are called to be a light to the nations, to bring the hopeless out of the darkness. Even in the midst of our own brokenness, our own despair, God has given us the gift of being hope to the hopeless. God’s grace and love can be found in the places where

we are the most fragile and vulnerable. It is in those places that we can make a difference in the world and a difference in the lives of the people around us.

It is in today's scripture that we first encounter the image of the Suffering Servant of God. Jesus is our example of God working in the world in order to establish peace and justice on the earth. God does not send a tyrant or a conqueror into the world to demand power and control. There is no revenge or turning the tables on the enemies. Instead, God sends his Son, Jesus, to bring peace, love, and reconciliation to the world. A light to the nations.

Let us Pray: *O God of Light, thank you for giving your Son, Jesus, to us to bring light to the nations. In the midst of our own brokenness, of circumstances we cannot control, guide us to be a servant to others and to bring light to those who are surrounded by darkness. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*



Friday, December 4, 2015

Text: Isaiah 42:16 – A Hymn of Praise

I will lead the blind

*by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known*

I will guide them.

*I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.*

*These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them.*

When I was six-years-old, my parents took us to Disneyworld. At one point, I found myself on the Space Mountain ride. I was super excited. The initial launch made me feel like I was on the Battlestar Galatica. Yet that feeling of excitement didn't last long. Soon it turned into fear. I was terrified to be in complete darkness, not knowing where or when the next up or down or curve would happen. I tried to close my eyes, but it didn't help. Instead, I could only squeeze my dad's hand and be comforted by his presence. The whole ride was less than five minutes but it seemed like it would never end. But then I saw it, the light. I knew the ride was over because I saw light. I was no longer terrified.

Sometimes in life, we find ourselves heading in an unfamiliar direction or in circumstances that are out of our comfort zone. God promises that he will be with us, guiding us along the unknown path. God will also be our strength and our support when we feel as if we are climbing an impossible mountain. When we are in darkness, God will bring us into the light. God has made this promise to us through his Son, Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus is present with us in all things.

Let us Pray: *Almighty God, thank you for being present with us and for not giving up on us. Thank you for making the rough roads in life level and passable. Continue to guide us toward*

you and help us to continue to praise you. In the name of your Son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.



Saturday, December 5, 2015

Text: Isaiah 43:1-2 – Restoration and Protection Promsied

But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

² *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;*

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

Water and fire are featured prominently in the story of God and God's people. From creation, we are told that God separated the waters. God made the seas that brought forth living creatures. We are also told that God separated the waters so that the Israelites could be freed from the oppressive slavery of the Pharaoh. God comes to Moses through a burning bush and the people are lead through the wilderness by a pillar of fire. God also comes to us through the waters of our baptism. In our baptism, we are named child of God and we receive the promise of eternal life and the inheritance to the kingdom. The God who created us and formed us also redeems us through his Son, Jesus. Jesus, by his death and resurrection, does not let the waters and fires of this world consume us. Instead, Jesus changes these elements of destruction into life-giving hope and healing. Jesus sets us free.

Let us Pray: *Lord of grace and mercy, thank you for setting us free from all that constrains us and consumes us in this life. Thank you for leading your people through turbulent waters, burning fire, and wilderness experiences. We praise the name of the one who has named, claimed and made us anew in our baptism. In the name of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.*

