

July 07, 2013

**Isaiah 66:10-14**

Hope: Peace Like a River

As we begin our series on the prophets, it might be helpful to understand something about the kind of persons the prophets were.

Abraham J. Heschel's two-volume work on *The Prophets* describes that the Hebrew prophets had quite different concerns than the Greek philosophers.

Heschel stated, that the Hebrew prophets, "instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, [they focus on] . . . widows and orphans, . . . the corruptions of judges and affairs of the market place" (Heschel, Vol 1, p. 3).

The prophet, as we might suspect, had were outraged by evil, and yet, rather than addressing their intolerance for evil in lofty terms, they deal with it in terms of the everyday realities of life.

"The things that horrified the prophets are [still today] daily occurrences all over the world" (Heschel, p. 3).

From the prophets we learn that God is concerned with the trivialities of life, the everyday realities we all face.

And because the daily stuff of life is of concern to God – it is of concern to the prophets.

Why this is of concern to the prophets is because "prophets insist that God is the sovereign center of life" (Peterson, *The Message*, 1197).

God is Lord, God creates and hold all life together – God is Lord over all!

The prophet is not merely a mouthpiece or instrument of God, the prophet is in partnership with God – they are embraced by the pathos of God and so they express not only the words of God, they make God known.

Heschel stated, "the words the prophet utters are not offered as souvenirs. [Their] speech to the people is not a reminiscence, a report, a hearsay" (Heschel, 22).

As Stephen Bevans states, "in season, out of season, despite opposition, derision, and persecution, the prophet is the one who discerns the meaning of daily events and speaks God's word to God's people" (*Prophetic Dialogue*, 40).

These prophets, "woke people up to the sovereign presence of God in their lives. They yelled, they wept, they rebuked, they soothed, they challenged, they comforted" (Peterson, 1197).

God is concerned with the daily aspects/trivialities of our lives.

What this debunks is the thought that God has no time for us – God is taking care of world-wide issues, what time does God have for me?

However, the prophets reveal that what matters to God is us – "it matters to God about us" as we read in 1 Peter.

**And so, it matters to us about God!**

Therefore, “the prophets purge our imaginations of this world’s assumptions on how life is lived and what counts in life. . . . Prophets train us in discerning the difference between the ways of the world and the ways of the gospel, keeping us present to the Presence of God” (Peterson, 1197).

In doing this, in representing God, “incarnating” God, the prophet “alienates the wicked as well as the pious, the cynics as well as the believers, the priests and princes, the judges and the false prophets” (Heschel, p. 18).

The prophet wants us to develop eyesight that sees all of life through the vision of God.

And so the prophets did two things: they expressed the worst that happens as God’s judgment – for if the worst is God’s judgment and not some disaster, “then it can be embraced, not denied or avoided, for God is good and intends our salvation”(Peterson, 1198), our being made whole.

And the second thing that prophets did was “to get people who were beaten down to open themselves up to the hope of God’s future. In the wreckage of exile and death and humiliation and sin, the prophet ignited hope, opening lives to the new work of salvation that God is about to do at all times and everywhere” (Peterson, 1197).

Walter Brueggemann adds further insight for our context through his study, *The Prophetic Imagination*.

He writes that the “American Church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or to act.”

In response, the prophets help us regain our footing in the vision of God as the people of God.

He states, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nourish, nurture, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. . . . [and to challenge] having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated.”

**This is particularly evident in the prophet Isaiah – from whom our text is drawn today.**

Isaiah, decried the people of God having other allegiances besides giving complete allegiance to God. They were excluding the orphans and widows, the stranger, and they adopted their own ways of being, neglecting the ways of God.

King Ahaz sought alliance with the king of Assyria to protect Judah from other nations wanting Israel to join them in an anti-Assyrian coalition.

Who would blame him?

To King Ahaz this was politically expedient – the things of God had to do with the private sphere, the real world called for real world alliances.

And “so Ahaz decided that it was more expedient to be ‘son and servant’ to the king of Assyria, than son and servant to the invisible God” (Heschel, pp 64-65).

As a result Judah surrendered herself to the empire of Assyria.

Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, who restored the temple and reestablished the public worship of God, also struggled with alliances.

During his reign the people of Judah became impatient with being subordinated to Assyria and so they sought to throw off this yoke.

Hezekiah, rather than relying on God, sought to ally Judah with Egypt, but then reconsidered when Isaiah admonished him.

Yet when Babylon sought to overthrow Assyria, the king of Babylon looked for allies and found one in Hezekiah.

**The problem with such alliances is that it is an alliance with the power of the sword; an alliance with death.**

Isaiah had three reasons for such opposition to any other alliance besides God:

“(1) reliance on a world power demonstrated the belief that [human beings] rather than God, weapons rather than attachment of [God], determined the destiny of the nations.

(2) Subservience to a nation such as Assyria meant accepting her gods and cults.

(3) An alliance with Assyria means an involvement in military operations.” (Heschel, 71).

Such alliances stood in stark contrast to the people of God’s rejection of Mesopotamia in the days of Abraham, and the rejection of Egypt in the days of Moses – a rejection of political and spiritual sovereignty (cf. Heschel, 71-72).

This is contrary to God’s vision, Isaiah’s vision – whereas “politics is based on the power of the sword . . .

Isaiah was waiting for the day when nations ‘shall beat their swords in plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.’

Alliances involve preparation for war, but Isaiah was horrified by the brutalities and carnage which war entailed.

In Isaiah’s boundless yearning he had a vision of the day when ‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war no more’ (2:4).

War spawns death. But Isaiah was looking to the time when the Lord ‘will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces’ (25:8).

Israel’s security lies in the covenant with God, not in covenants with Egypt or other nation.” (Heschel, 73).

And so engaging the prophets is to help us **re-discover our identity as the people of God, to give allegiance to God**, who live amid nations and cultures, which more often than not, live contrary to the ways of God.

With that said, our text this morning reveals this different vision, a different kind of eyesight from our national eyesight.

**We are to see our place in the world through God’s eyes – to have the eyes of God.**

In Isaiah 66:10-14, we witness a conversation between the heavens and earth; between Yahweh and his creation sharing a vision of hope – a vision of that which is new:

Here in the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of Isaiah we discover God’s vision of inclusion, God’s vision of new creation, God’s vision of new life in the midst of everything else that vies for death.

**Heavens:** Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her;

**Earth:** Rejoice greatly with her, all you who were mourning over her (until now).

**Heavens:** For you will feed and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance of her glory.’

**Herald:** For this is what Yahweh says:

**Yahweh:** ‘Look at me extending to her prosperous peace like a river,  
and the wealth of nations like an overflowing stream from which you may suckle;

**Heavens:** You may be carried on a hip (like a baby) and you may play on her knees (like a toddler)

**Yahweh:** Like a person whose mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and with Jerusalem you may (now) be comforted.’

**Earth:** And you will see and your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass;

**Heavens:** And it is known that Yahweh’s hand (is) with his servants and indignation (is) with his enemies.”

This is a vision of hope, a vision of what we see if we see with the eyes of God.

**So what does Jerusalem represent?** What does it mean for us to “rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her” as North American Mennonites living in a land that seeks our allegiance?

– that seeks for us to have another vocation other than participating with God in making all things new?

It does not mean we make every effort to save the State of Israel and for Jerusalem only to be in the hands of Israel

– Jerusalem is more than a geographical location in biblical understanding.

**Jerusalem has double understanding.**

It represents the city of God’s people who are sinful, apostate, abominable, subject to God’s wrath, besieged by enemies, and finally destroyed

– indeed a reason for weeping and mourning. (cf. ISDB, Vol 2, 1031).

Yet, on the other hand Jerusalem represents the hope of the world –

“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth.” (Ps. 48:1f).

“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 that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

### **Jerusalem is the city of God – the place where God dwells.**

To rejoice and identify with Jerusalem is to have **our eyes focused upon God** – to give our complete allegiance to God

– to surrender all that we do to the purposes of God

– to live our lives in ways that do not demonstrate the ways of our culture, but demonstrate the ways of God.

In our allegiance to God, our walking with God, our living with God – we do not walk alone.

In all we encounter – personal struggles and illness, public struggles to conform, in giving allegiance to God, we find comfort in God’s presence.

God is with us!! Revelation 21 declares the same!

Contrary to the promises with which success tempts us – wealth, success, power;

- in submitting all of who we are to God

– even in midst of our struggles

– we see life and the direction of life so differently that even in the midst of all that seeks to overpower humanity, **we are able to flourish.**

Rejoicing and flourishing – in a world that seeks to eke out an existence from within the graveyard, **we find ourselves to be troublemakers in the world**

– in offering a different vision of life, life rooted in Yahweh, we trouble the world with a different vision,

- a vision of acceptance, inclusion, empowerment, one humanity in Christ (the stuff we talked about this past week at Convention in developing a statement on immigration).

### **A vision that truly can transform relationships and creation.**

Our allegiance to God empowers us to not only be prophetic in the world, but to be agents of transformation in the power of the Spirit.

In living in allegiance to Yahweh and Yahweh’s reign, we demonstrate and declare that life, hope, joy, peace, equality, are no longer to be found in the places of death – rather they are to be found through Yahweh incarnate

– Christ Jesus

– through whom we are becoming a resurrected, transformed people, people full of the Spirit of God.

In Christ, we demonstrate and declare a different reality

– a reality of life

– a reality that is not measured in the metrics of the world

– but in the metrics of God’s purposes – resulting in true rejoicing, true flourishing – **an abundance!**

This abundance is the promise – the Lord extends a river of peace to Jerusalem; a river surging, unstoppable, full of the power of wholeness, security = shalom! – a river of peace for all the world.

### **This is the vision of Jesus!**

To whom we give our complete allegiance . . .

This is the vision of Jerusalem!

This is God's vision for the world!

So – “Rejoice with Jerusalem, be glad for her”

For such rejoicing rejoices with God and God's vision of a new creation!

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