

## **Advent Two – Sunday, December 7, 2014**

### **O That You Would Reveal Your Peace**

In a disturbed and noisy world we hear God say, “Comfort, comfort my people.”

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Mark 1:1-8; 2 Peter 3:8-15a

On this second Sunday of Advent we hear God’s words to us of comfort and peace.

We hear these words

- like a dream we struggle with remembering when we wake up
- or like trying to watch a video that’s playing on a scratched DVD
- or like listening to a song on the radio that is distorted because we are not tuned into well.

And so we strain to hear, to see, to remember what we hope is there

- what has been declared is there
- but we struggle with having a clear understanding of what is happening or what is being expressed.

Can we grasp and take hold of comfort and peace, having confidence that it is there

- yet, not at all fully clear to us as to where it is or what it is?

We hear Isaiah’s words, giving voice to God’s voice, to God’s people

- “Comfort, comfort my people”

The people hear this voice after years in Babylonian exile

- removed from God in Jerusalem, having had to develop a new understanding of God’s presence with them in a difficult place, having figured out how to live in this place of exile as God’s people making it their home
- somehow finding hope and peace in a hopeless and peaceless place.

Centuries later, John the Baptist comes on the scene expressing these same words Isaiah expressed, to God’s people exiled in their own land, under Roman domination.

Not free, not at peace, but having eked out an existence in which they found a way to live as the people of God in a place where Caesar is Lord.

Millennia later, here we are

- in a postmodern culture, in the land of the free and the brave
- hearing the word of God to us
- God’s people
- in the midst of our own seeking for comfort and peace in a land, in our lives, where it is just as elusive.

Isaiah, John, and today  
– “a voice of one calling:”

“In whatever wilderness we find ourselves,  
– prepare, prepare, prepare, the way for the Lord;

Make straight in the desert, make straight in the wilderness (remove boulders, remove what hinders a straight path) of what we are experiencing a highway for God to come to us.

Every valley shall be raised up (filled in), every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all the people will see it together.”

In Scripture

- metaphors of land, of soil, of roadways and pathways
- are indicative of our lives, of what is going on in us
- the hard, rocky, weedy, or fertile state of our lives
- the barriers, obstacles, rough and rugged condition of our lives.

And so, because of the state of our lives,  
God calls for this voice to “Cry out”

- for the people of God to hear,
- to take notice,
- to remember the dream of God in their lives,
- to see life beyond the scratches of the video of their lives,
- to hear hope, comfort and peace,
- beyond the distortion of what is being experienced.

And so what do we hear?  
Does God have our attention?  
Do we hear God?

Does the psalmist express what is our confession?

When we hear this voice of God calling out in the midst of our deserts?

“I will listen to what the LORD says; God promises peace to his people.”

How can this word of peace be an actual word of peace in us?

Last week I mentioned that being Anabaptist means that we live in the present, in light of the future God is bringing about  
– we live believing that God’s future of all things being made new is a reality that shapes how we presently live.

This is the basis of the reality of our hope  
– we live in the reality of God’s future shalom.

This is why I keep saying: “In our being missional we confess that we are ‘sign, foretaste, and instrument of God’s present and coming reign.’”

Being Anabaptist also means something else.  
We put ethics before doctrine

In putting ethics before doctrine

- we seek to live into our beliefs,
- we seek to live out what is the way of God,
- before we give words to our actions, as description of what we believe.
- we **obey God** before we understand God or the ways of God!

In committing ourselves to live as God’s covenant people, especially in the midst of our having questions

- of what is going on in the world,
- of expressing our “whys” about God
- and our “whys” about what God is doing
- or “not doing” in our lives,

We live believing God, obeying God.

We live into seeing,

We live into believing,

We live into God’s hope, God’s comfort, God’s peace

– by acting on our belief before we believe it.

John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance and baptism

– as Matthew expresses.

In listening to God/obeying God

– we repent

- we turn our minds to God and the ways of God,
- even when we do not fully know what such repentance will accomplish in our lives.

In listening to God/obeying God

– we yield to God’s deliverance in us

- of all that enslaves us,
- even when we do not fully know how we will escape what enslaves us.

In listening to God/obeying God

- we enter into the waters of baptism, to identify with Christ, who has identified with us, dying with him in order to be raised with him to new life,
- even when we do not fully grasp how living this life in which we have been crucified and resurrected with Christ challenges us to live out a different way of being human in the world.

In listening to God/obeying God

- we commit ourselves to be disciples of Jesus, to walk in his ways, to act in ways that are contrary to the ways of the world,
- even when we do not fully expect it to work

And many times it seems it does not work

– though we come to realize that our lives give witness to a different reality in not contributing to the old ways.

Yet, listening to God is no simple affair.

Scripture is full of people wrestling with trying to live in obedience to God.

Me as well – example of my call into ministry 40 years ago this month – wrestled and refused God’s call 6 times; when finally relented 7<sup>th</sup> time (because I was tired of wrestling with God), I said I would respond, but only if God assured me it was his voice calling me. Once I obeyed I was filled with a sense of peace – presence of God.

In listening to God/obeying God

- we discover that we open ourselves wide to God
- so that God can act and live in us and through us to do what God is doing in bringing about peace.

In listening to God/obeying God

- our lives are no longer just our own,

We become useful for what God is doing in - re-creating, restoring, restorying the world  
- in peace, in hope, in love, in the fruit of the Spirit.

And as we celebrate that our lives belong to God,

We are enabled to make the courageous confession

–“God, do what you want in me and through me!”

What places of exile are you in?

What places of not seeing God active in your life are you experiencing?

Hear a voice of one crying in the wilderness again this Advent season.

Hear a voice calling us to make a highway for our God, for Christ Jesus to have unimpeded access into our lives.

And then open yourself to God's activity in your life.

Receive and discover what God is bringing about  
– comfort and peace.

**And**

**– may you not just hear this voice.**

**May you also be that voice for others.**