

Advent 3 Reflection  
December 17, 2023

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Psalm 126 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24 St. Luke 1: 46-55

Thus far, our readings from Isaiah have focussed on the promise from God that he will initiate the Kingdom with the gifting of One who will be the herald, bringing good from the wilderness. This voice, the one who will cry, "Prepare the way of the Lord" will cede to the One sent, the One to be called Emmanuel, God-with-us and through the life and work of the One sent, the seeds of the peaceable kingdom of lions and lambs lying down together will be sown.

Our attention today is drawn to Isaiah's vision of how this Anointed One will show himself to the world: he will be someone who will tell the poor and the marginalized that they are beloved of the Creator; he will comfort and hold those whose lives have been shattered by the cruelty and insensitivity shown them by those who see themselves as the powerful of the world; through his words and actions, those who have been imprisoned by the powers that be will be set free from the confines imposed on them by others and will be invited to join the dance of the liberated. Emmanuel will sing of the love and compassion of God and will invite those who have no voice to join in the song of the new creation, to add their voice to the chorus of those whom God favours. In this new time, the ones now disenfranchised politically, economically and socially will be the ones who will embody and bring into reality the blueprint of the new city of light and hope. This peaceable kingdom will be hallmarked by an outpouring of justice, sealed with a new covenant which is described with great detail in the letter written to the "Hebrews"- a covenant "made not with words but with the sacrifice of the One Sent. This will be the everlasting agreement made between God and his children, a covenant of righteousness and equity and Eden will be reborn from the ashes of the old".

The author of Psalm 126 describes the scene when God brings his children home. In the history, this is probably a reflection from David of the return from exile, but certainly applies well beyond that event to embrace and encompass that moment when the promised kingdom comes as Jesus promises it will – we will be a people whose "mouths are filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy...(for) the Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy." Like the psalmist, we know that God keeps promises and that in God's good time, as Julian of Norwich says, "All will be well and all will be well." While we may not feel in our immediate time that joyous moment when we will be ingathered into the kingdom; when we still feel burdened by pain and loneliness; when the darkness creeps through our lives as we look for the sunrise, we know this: "those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. The one who goes out weeping carrying seed to sow will return with songs of joy..."

Paul was more than likely fully aware of Psalm as he wrote to his sisters and brothers in Thessalonika. He begins by reminding them that the kingdom will come but will arrive "like a thief in the night. You are all sons and daughters of the light and of the day." He reminds the community that they no longer live in the darkness and the shadows of the valley, but are the ones who come, to reword Psalm 126 bearing the seed of light and hope and joy to plant in the world. With this said, Paul turns to how the fellowship should live during this interim time: he

writes to them, “live in peace with each other...be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances...do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything and hold on to what is good; avoid every kind of evil.” I know that this seems sorta “pie in the sky” at times, especially when life seems difficult and dark, when God seems to have gone awol; when we do not feel the comforting love of the Creator and turn our backs to embrace other gods who offer us quick fixes and transient hope. But, Paul assures that of the faithfulness of God and that “the One who calls you is faithful...”

Mary was just, as a BBC commentator once stated, “a wee slip of a lass” who was living an extraordinarily ordinary life until...until she went to the village well on a day like any other day. While waiting for the others to gather with her in their daily ritual of water-bearing, she dreams of the life which lies before her – the life of a dutiful and obedient wife, a fierce and loving mother, a peacemaker and manager of a household 0- all those things expected of all women of her day.

But, God had other plans didn’t he – through a servant sent, God tells Mary that she will bear a gift to the world in the form of a child who will be called Emmanuel and will be the One who will bring into reality the oh-so-long promised kingdom of peace. Today we remember how Mary wrestled with and then decided to be faithful to The Voice which called her by name. This is confirmed soon afterwards when she visits Elizabeth her cousin who is also pregnant and as they embrace, the child in Elizabeth’s womb seems to reach out to touch the child in Mary’s. Feeling this, Elizabeth joyously declares, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear.” Mary stares at her cousin and then , realizing the truth and the enormity of it all, whispers, “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant...he has scattered those who are proud in their innermost thoughts; he has brought down the rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble”. He has filled the hungry with good things but he has sent the rich away empty.”

Today, we remember in our Advent journey the faithfulness of God to be present to even the poorest of us through it all; of the God who sees in each and every one of His creation all the potential in the universe to be bearers of the Light and embracers of love and huggers of hope and for this we say, “Alleluia! Maranatha – Come Lord Jesus, come.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION THIS WEEK

1. Isaiah is given a vision of how God wants us to live – as ones anointed to share the good news of His love, to offer hope and comfort to those who live lives of unquiet desperation, to free people from all the prisons in which they live. As we edge closer and closer to the Light of Bethlehem, how are you doing in this regard? What can I do to be more faithful to this call from Isaiah in my life?
2. In the psalm today, David says that “the Lord has done great things” – in your life, what do you see as gifts from God for which you are grateful? How do you show that gratitude to the Giver for the gifts with which you have been blessed?

3. Paul seems genuinely to be in love with the community in Thessalonika because they are faithful witnesses to Jesus. He celebrates the life they are forging for themselves as they continue to grow in wisdom and understanding of God's will for them. How might we as a community deepen our commitment to the comfort ministry and all the other servant acts to which we have been called. What would you like to see Holy Trinity spend time thinking and praying about in 2024?
4. As you think about Mary and her encounter at the well, what strikes you as the most wonderful part of the story? Have you ever asked God to show you the path he wills for you and ask for the road map for that journey?
5. What is your wish for your parish in this coming year and what are you willing to do to help make that dream a reality?