

“Be Not Afraid! Prophetic Peace Be With You”

Psalm 112: 4-9a; Isaiah 41: 8-10

The irony of the fact that today we light the candle of peace while all around us we hear stories of mass shootings and destruction is not missed by me. The contrast that can be found when we hold up our bulletin covers for today that proclaim: “Be Not Afraid! Prophetic Peace Be With You” to the recent Front page of the Daily Post that declares “God Is Not Fixing This” is not missed by me. The accusation from this same front page that says all we offer to the victims, their families and the first responders to this mass shooting and all the others are meaningless platitudes while I seem to be doing just that is not missed by me. The irony of the fact that today we light the candle of peace, while dreaming of God’s peaceable Kingdom to come when it seems like each day we grow further and further away from this dream becoming a reality is not missed by me.

And yet still, in spite of all that, I still say to you: “People of God, Be Not Afraid”. You might be wondering what makes me so confident in the face of such brokenness. What makes me so hopeful in the face of such darkness? What makes me so assured in the face of such despair?

To answer these questions, I offer our Words of Scripture once more: “

They shine in the dark for others...They are merciful, and compassionate.

⁵ Those who lend generously are good people— as are those who conduct their affairs with justice. ⁶ Yes, these sorts of people will never be shaken; ⁷ they won't be frightened at bad news. Their hearts are steady, trusting in the LORD. ⁸ Their hearts are firm; they aren't afraid....They give freely to those in need. Their righteousness stands forever. Their strength increases gloriously.

So don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand. So shine like lights in the darkness to show the world that love will always overcome.

To others these may just seem like empty words with no meaning but to me these words are a reminder of my call, our call as people of faith to be prophets of peace in this world. These words are a reminder of our call to never ever let the light of hope be extinguished from our hearts, our call to always, always remember that one day, the lion and the lamb will lay down together.

No, these are not just empty words for us. They are the foundation of our faith as the people of God. It may be hard for others to see the power behind these simple words but I know them to be true.

These words remind me, remind us of what it means to have our lives grounded in the presence of God. These words remind us what can happen when we allow...no that is not the right word...when we **make** the presence of God the center of our lives. We become more than just people. We become lights in the darkness, shining for all the world to see. We become lights of hope, lights of peace, not because of what we have done but because of who God is.

Let me explain: We are told that our God is steadfast. We are told that our God is faithful for all generations and slow to anger. We are told that our God is merciful and full of compassion. But these are not just words to us, things that someone told us or we read about in a book. NO... We have experienced all these things in our lives. We have experienced God's love. We have experienced God's grace. We have experienced God's compassion. We have been transformed by these things.

We know that in love our God has named us and claimed us as God's own. And by doing so, as the people of God, we are invited to reflect that same love through our words, through our actions, through our deeds. We know we are called to share this life-giving, this life changing love, this love that brings healing and wholeness to all of God's creation with others, no ifs ands or buts.

So when I share these words from Psalm 112 and Isaiah 41, these are not just some empty words. They are life giving words that have transformed us into

the people God created us and calls us to be. These are words of prophetic peace for the world. They reflect the full picture of God's steadfast love that endures even through crisis and adversity. These words remind us that the God upon whom the universe depends is the same God who reaches out in love to God's people and says, "Do Not Be Afraid. I am with you".

So as naïve as it may sound, I offer these words not as a way to gloss over the darkness and brokenness that fills our world but rather as a way to remind us who we are and more importantly whose we are. I offer this "Be Not Afraid" as a way to hold ourselves and to hold others nearer to our God so that the peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding, the peace where no more hate and hurt exist, the peace where there will be no more dying, no more mass shootings, no more empty words offered to ignore the pain, I offer these words to everyone today as a way for the peace of God to thrive. I say Be Not Afraid in hopes that by doing so, we make God's shalom manifest in our world.

Let's be honest for a moment, shall we?

We know, we know our God is in the business of bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation and as God's children, we have been invited to be a part of that work as well. We have been invited to be a part of the work of redeeming all of creation, the work of mending the broken places. We have been

invited to be a part of the very important work of seeking God's justice and sharing God's compassion with all of God's children.

We also know that this Kingdom work is not easy work. I never said it was. We should never pretend that this Kingdom work, the work of sharing love with all others, the work of showing God's mercy to others, the work of sharing God's compassion with everyone is all sunshine and rainbows. Sometimes it can be downright frightening. I fully admit that it would so much easier to ignore our call to be prophets of peace. It would be so much easier to forget that we have the power to help create the peaceable kingdom here on earth. I fully admit that life would be so much simpler if it could all be about me and Jesus. But it is not.

We don't live in a vacuum. We don't live on a deserted island. We don't live alone.

We live in community with others, others who think differently from us, others who look differently from us. We also live in community with others who would rather us be silent and just be another cog in the system. I fully admit it would be so much easier if this broken, messy, dysfunctional community that we call the world was not the community into which God calls us to go. But God did and God still does. We can no longer be silent and sit in our pews, pretending the problems don't exist. We can no longer be content with a broken failing system

and be the people that God created us and calls to be. Let me say that again: We can no longer be content with a failing broken system and be the people God created us and calls us to be. This doesn't reflect the true character of God, a God who is loving, a God who is merciful, and a God who is compassionate. Our God is not sitting passively waiting for us to figure things out. Our God is still very active in our world, working to bring healing and wholeness, to mend the broken places. Our God is still very active in our world today, comforting God's people. And we are called to do the same.

So maybe it is time we finally admit that it is not okay that fourteen people died in a mass shooting and we have become so immune to the news. It is not okay that children are going hungry in our world and we are more worried about Christmas lists. It is not okay that we are destroying our world and we act like we have another one to go to. It is not okay that my five year old and my three year old are practicing active shooter drills at their child care and we say that this is the best way to keep them safe. This broken failing system is not okay. We should not be pretending that this is our acceptable norm.

As prophets of God's peace, it is time for us to wake up and realize that we can no longer be content with the way things are in this world and be the people God created us and calls us to be. This goes against the very character of our God,

the same God who took on the pain of the cross so that we might live, the same God who overcame the grave, the same God who came and lived among us, who showed us that there is another way...a way of peace, a way of compassion, a way of welcome that embraces all as children of God. Maybe it is time we start realizing that the same God who calls us to live in community with one another is the same God whose steadfast love endures even through crisis and adversity and is also the same God who needs us to start acting like the people God created us and calls us to be.

As people of faith we are called to be prophets of God's peace. We are called to help others experience the transforming power of God's love so that all will experience God's peaceable Kingdom here on earth. We are called to be sources of light for others.

It is not easy work. I get it. I'm not even going to pretend like it is. That's why these aren't empty words to me. They are pledges of comfort and strength. They are words given to us so that we will have courage to speak out against the injustices that fill our world. These words are words of prophetic peace for the world.

No, these are not just empty words for us as people of God. They are words that call us to go out into this world, helping to create God's peaceable Kingdom

here on earth all the while reminding us that we are not alone in this world. These words are sources of light for a broken world shining in the darkness, reflecting God's steadfast love.

And you want to know how I know: During the 1960's, many of the people who participated in the freedom marches were asked, "How do you keep going? Aren't you afraid? They come at you with attack dogs and water hoses. They beat you and they jail you. How do you have the courage to keep marching?"

And the answer was always the same:

"We have hope in the vision of God's peaceable Kingdom. We have a call to be prophets in this world. NO this Kingdom work is not easy but our hearts are steady. We fear no evil because our God is there marching along right beside us."

Now is the time for us to realize that we cannot be content with a broken failing system that creates division, that brings more hurt and hate and be the people that God created us and calls us to be."

Now is the time to share God's prophetic peace with all the world and bring healing and wholeness to God's creation.

Hear these words: People of God, Be Not Afraid! Amen.