

“The Peace of Wild Things”

Isaiah 40: 21a, 26-30

As I was working on this sermon, it was not the words of the prophet Isaiah which kept going through my mind. It was the words of another prophet. His words call us all to go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water. His words speak of coming into the presence of still waters. His words compel us to look up at the night sky filled with stars, to let these heavenly lights fill our hearts with comfort and hope, so that we might rest in the grace of the world and know that we are free. I kept coming back to this prophet's words, words which invite us to know and experience the peace of wild things.

Of course, I am talking about KY's own farmer poet and prophet, Wendell Berry. Yet, in spite of the difference of thousands of years, Berry's words resonate and reflect the same sentiment as the ones which Isaiah wrote to the people of Israel all those years ago. Isaiah wrote to the people during a time of despair, during a time when all hope seemed lost. The people were in exile and had been separated from their home for such a long time. They were waiting and wondering where God was in all of this. Into this grief and despair, Isaiah brings a word of God for the people of God. It is word of well-being. It is a word of assurance. It is a word of comfort but more importantly it was a word of solidarity.

Through his images of creation, Isaiah invites the people to remember always that the same God who created the heavens and the earth, to remember always that the same God who spoke this world into being created them and formed them in God's image. During one of the darkest of times for the people of Israel, Isaiah speaks of the peace of wild things as he reminds the people that the same God who stilled the waters of chaos in the beginning is the same God who has the power to lift them up on eagles' wings, renewing their strength so that they may run and not be weary, so that they may walk and not faint. With these images of creation, Isaiah reminds the people that the constant grace shown to us as people of faith, shown to us through God's creation, is the gift of peace which will set us free.

I know that this is not a usual Advent text. Normally when we are looking at Isaiah 40, we are focusing on the beginning of this text as it speaks of making a way in the desert, as it speaks to the promise of return. But as I have shared, Wendell Berry's words kept echoing in my heart. I was drawn to the second part of Isaiah's words of comfort for the people of Isaiah. Because you see, both of these prophets speak to something this world does not understand. They speak to us of waiting in hope. They speak to us of waiting while working for peace. These prophets speak to our waiting as people of faith. They celebrate it as a redirection of our lives. Their words recognize that in our waiting as people of faith, we see

and experience God's footsteps in this world, footsteps which bring about healing and wholeness not only for all of God's people but for God's creation as well.

These prophets speak to a waiting which embraces the knowledge that God is God and we are not, something creation remembers always and something we as humankind regularly forget. These prophets speak to an active waiting which reflects the call of Genesis 2, which is to "not sit idle in paradise but to water the garden, to care for life, to worship and praise God for the beauty of creation."

Sure, there are those who would say Isaiah and Berry's words are just that....words which express an escapist existence, words which allow us to ignore the real pain and brokenness of life. There are those who would argue that Isaiah and Berry's words have no merit in our world because after all they only offer a Pollyanna existence, offer an existence which is out of touch with reality.

To those who say all these, I offer this story...In August of 2013, a couple who had lost everything, their house, their savings account, their IRAs, a couple who had lost everything learned of the husband's diagnosis of a degenerative brain disease. The doctors told them that most people usually pass in six to eight years of diagnosis and that more than likely, the husband had already had this disease six years. To say that they were devastated is an understatement. They did not know what to do. Everything they had relied upon was gone. They were in despair and filled with grief.

One day, the wife happened to find a book which she had read in her 20's. It had been packed away and had been gathering dust for years and as they were packing up their meager belongings, she rediscovered it. It was about a journey of five hundred miles taken by this man. This man had walked the South West Coast Path in England with his dog and told of his transformational journey. The wife saw this book and thought we really don't have anything else to lose so they should give it a try. They sold everything they could and took off on this five hundred mile journey.

Their journey took them over unfamiliar territory, had them accepting the kindness of strangers and eventually had them reclaiming their sense of purpose. When asked what gave her strength for the journey, she simply said, "Being in nature was my safe place, something I understood and at the same time, something I didn't understand at all. There were experiences with swallows, badgers and falcons. There was even a bizarre encounter with a tortoise. But "when you are camping, you are not just looking at nature. You are immersed in it. When you're out there, day after day, night after night, you start to feel as if the natural environment has got a cohesive element to it that we have lost. The wind affects the water and the clouds. It is like one big whole, and after being in it for a while, I knew I was part of that big circular movement. [There was a constant sense of peace, a constant sense of grace which we can never find in our daily lives because

all the time we are running, and rushing about. This rush and running allows us to ignore others while only thinking about ourselves. This rush and running allows us to forget our connection as humanity and to the Earth.]

What this couple, what Wendell Berry, what Isaiah understands is that those who experience the peace of wild things, those who allow creation to restore and reset our connection to the cohesiveness of it all, what this couple, what Wendell Berry, what Isaiah understands is that where the world wants to rush, as people of faith, we choose waiting. Because we know that those who wait upon the Lord, are also actively working as participants in God's mission of healing and wholeness, those who wait upon the Lord are also actively working to bring about justice and peace not only for those who look like us or act like us, but for all of God's people.

Because as part those who wait upon the Lord, our lives have been so vibrantly transformed because we know and have experienced in our lives, that God will do for the exiles, for the lost, for the people in despair, that God will do for the pain of this world what God has always done for creation, what God has done since the beginning of time, we know that God will give life where before there was none. God will bring the peace of the Earth to those who wait upon the Lord and renew our strength like eagles, so that we may run and not faint, so that we may walk and not be weary as we wait for the coming of God's Kingdom just as it is in heaven.

May we never forget this as we join creation today and all days, as we join creation in waiting for the day to come when the peace of wild things becomes our embodied hope and the day of God's Shalom to come on Earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.