

## Light for our Darkness: Wait

### Isaiah 11: 1-10

This is one of my favorite texts from the Book of Isaiah. Usually when I hear it, I find myself feeling hopeful and begin to anxiously await the day when a little child will lead us, like I do on every Advent journey. But this year, not so much. At this point on my road to Bethlehem I feel more melancholy than hopeful, more anxious than filled with a sense of peace. This year, I feel more like weeping than rejoicing when I hear Isaiah's beautiful hope-filled vision.

Usually when I read these words, I'm reminded of the way things should be in our world, the way God promised it will be one day when the Kingdom of God is fully realized here on earth. Usually when I read this text about God's Peaceable Kingdom, I find comfort in the images and am inspired by them; images where the lion lays with the lamb, where mothers don't worry about their children getting hurt when they reach down into the adder's den; images of a community filled with peace on earth; where no one goes to bed hungry, where no one lives in fear, images where people are welcomed and embraced as God's own beloved ones.

But this year, when I read these words from Isaiah, it is not a vision of peace that I see but the harsh realities of our world, stark contrasts to the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom.

When I hear these beautifully haunting words from the prophet, I see and immediately know that we live in a world that is miles away from the one that Isaiah visions. I know that we live in a world where the lion destroys the lamb, where mothers watch their children die of starvation and disease. I know that we live in a world where people live in fear each day, wondering when the next bomb will drop or the next spray of gunfire will occur. I know that we live in a world that is divided, broken and hurting. I know that we live in a world where hate continues to grow and the excuses are race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

This year, I'm not hopeful or anxiously waiting. This year, I find myself wondering, wondering if peace is even a possibility for our broken and hurting world. It seems like we as a society, as a culture are no longer disturbed by the violence in the world. It seems like we no longer blink an eye at images of death and disease. We are no longer outraged by stories of discrimination and oppression. I find myself wondering: Is peace possible when we have become so numb? Is peace possible when we have come to accept disorder and chaos as normal, as the intended status quo? Is peace possible when it seems like we have become content to sit in the darkness, waiting for someone else to make it right? Is peace possible when it seems like we have given up the vision of a Peaceable Kingdom on earth?

These are the questions that have been circling around in my head all week. These are the questions that have turned my usually easy Advent journey into rough terrain. I am not the first to have these wonderings. They have been asked for years by people of faith who are tired of the brokenness, tired the hurt that fills our world. These are the same wonderings that have been asked throughout all generations by people have waited and wondered when they look at the world around them if peace was even a possibility.

Just like Isaiah asked and answered when he shared his vision of peace with his community thousands of years ago. He too wondered if peace was possible when he looked at the world around him. Things were looking bleak for his community and he wondered how he can share this vision of the Peaceable Kingdom in a time when peace seemed like a far off possibility. He was writing during one of the darkness times in Israelite history. The nation of Judah was under constant attack by the Assyrians. The king was one of the worst kings ever in their history. People were ignoring God and the poor were being oppressed and forgotten. Isaiah's world was broken, hurting and divided. Peace seemed so far off for the people of God at that time

But Isaiah had this vision of peace and he was able to share it with hope and with confidence because he remembered. Isaiah remembered and was reminded through this vision that God's story is so much bigger than we even realize. God's

story is a story where the impossible is made possible. God's story is a story where a ninety year old woman bears a son. God's story is a story where God works through a man who lies and cheats his brother out of his birthright and later in life becomes a father of a great nation. God's story is a story where a man is told to build a boat on dry land because a flood is coming. God's story is a story where the impossible is made possible. God's story is a vision where peace is a possibility even in a world that is broken, divided and hurting. Isaiah remembers the good news that God's story is our story and it is a story that stretches our assumptions about what can be.

So Isaiah shares his vision of peace to remind his community of this amazing story which was theirs as well. He shares this vision of hope to shake them up out of their stupor. He wants them to know that they have been numb for far too long. They had forgotten this wonderful life-transforming and in doing so, they had let the world tell the story, not God. They had believed the world when it said that death, darkness, and pain are normal and the status quo. They had believed the world when it said peace will never happen. They had believed the world when it said that there was nothing they could do to change the way it was or to make it right.

Isaiah shares this vision to waken them up and to remind them that God's story is their story and nothing is impossible through God. He wants to expose the

truth that the ways things were was not what God intended. God's intended order for God's people is peace. God's normal for all of God's creation is peace. God's plan all along was for God's people to live in peace, not disorder, not chaos, not brokenness which was now leading their lives. The community had lived with darkness, with pain, with disorder for so long that they had gotten used to them and had begun to think of them as status quo.

This vision of peace is to remind the people that God's intended order for creation was, is and forever will be peace. And Isaiah says to the people that they know this is to be true because they had already experienced this peace in their lives. They had already seen how God's peace could transform and create new life. They had already seen how God's peace had already been made present in their lives. All they had to do was open their eyes and pay attention to where God's presence and God's peace was happening right before their eyes and in their community as the real norm of life, as the real order that guide their lives.

The good news is that Isaiah knew that that Spirit of God was already upon the people and it was transforming them. It was waking them up from their stupor. It was sweeping through their nation and creating new life. All they had to do was watch and wait for the promises of God to be fulfilled. But this waiting was not a passive waiting that relieved them of any Kingdom responsibilities. It was an active waiting, where they were called to speak works of peace and do acts of

justice. It was an active waiting where they were to sow seeds of hope and show the compassion of God to their neighbors. It was an active waiting where they were called to create a community here on earth that reflected the Kingdom of God, where everyone was welcomed and embraced as beloved children of God. Isaiah calls the community to watch and wait, alert and hopeful. And that is exactly what Isaiah calls us to do today as well. Just like he called his community to work for justice and compassion because they had already experienced the good news in their lives, he calls us to do the same. Because just like Isaiah's community, we've already experienced the life transforming and life giving peace of God in our lives and have been given the promise of new that it brings. We've already been a part of the story, God's story, where the impossible is made possible.

And this is the good news that moves us from melancholy to hopeful, from anxious to peace-filled. We already know the good news of our God: Nothing is impossible through the Spirit of God! That is our story! That is the story that gives us hope, gives us peace, that is the story that transforms us to become the people that God creates us to be. Just like Isaiah, we know that peace is a possibility in our world because God is still working. God is still moving. God still will have the last word. All we have to do is open our eyes to the presence of God in our lives, open our eyes to the peace of God that surrounds us, open our eyes to the Kingdom of God in our midst.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon the people of God transforming us, shaping us, changing us into the people that God created us to be. All we have to do is watch and wait: alert and hopeful. All we have to do is realize that while we wait, we are not handed excuses to become numb or accept what the world says is status quo. We are called to do the work Christ is calling us to do and trust God to use the results of our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth. We are called to speak words of justice and do acts of compassion. We are called to sow seeds of hope and create a community of peace for all of God's children.

Because we are not the only ones waiting during this time. The poor are waiting to be remembered. The voiceless are waiting to be heard. The hurt are waiting to be made well. The outcasts are waiting to be welcomed. And most of all, God is waiting for us, waiting for us to act, waiting for us to become the people that God created us to be, and waiting for us to be ready for the amazing work that God is already doing in our communities and in our world.

God is waiting for us to step out of the darkness, waiting for us to be ready. God is waiting for us to embrace, affirm and make the vision of God's Peaceable Kingdom on earth a reality for all of God's children. God is waiting for us to believe the promise that nothing is impossible through the Spirit of the Lord. May we stay alert and hopeful as we open our eyes to the possibilities of peace in our midst. Amen.