

## “Moving Forward With Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child”

### Isaiah 45: 1-7

I'll admit this seems like an odd text for Children's Sabbath. For starters, no children are mentioned and secondly, it is really violent with all its talk of smashing doors and leveling mountains. No peaceful easy feeling here. No Jesus loves me feel good moment to be found here in this particular prophetic text. This text is down and dirty, harsh and brutal. In no way does this text let us off the hook. It grabs our attention. It forces us to pay attention to what is going on around us.

Okay, now that I say it out loud. I'm going to take back everything I just said. This is the perfect text for Children's Sabbath for all the reasons I just mentioned. Because, let's be honest usually when it comes to our children and youth, more often than not, we say things like it is better to see them than to hear them. When it comes to our children and youth, we as adults tend to simply and sanitize, creating a photo shopped picture of perfection while ignoring the dark realities many of our children and youth face today...gun violence in school, poverty rates sky-rocketing, programs like Head Start and WIC being underfunded, health insurance markets flooded with uncertainty...and this is just naming a few.

All these very adult problems have become reality for too many of the children and youth in our community, in our nation and in our world.

Yes, I'll be the first to admit that Children's Sabbath is a soap box issue for me. Partly because I volunteer at Northside, our local elementary school. It breaks my heart to see the brown plastic Kroger bags bundled with food lined up against the school office's walls, did you hear that, I said walls, not wall. It breaks my heart to know that these bags will be slipped into various backpacks for families who rely on them to help feed their family each weekend. It breaks my heart to know that this year, one of the grants approved by our trustees was for funding to pay off school lunch room debt each quarter for this school year. I recently called the School Board office to find out what this quarter's school room debt was for Northside. The woman said, "Oh, you called on a good day. It is only \$31.30, not too bad." I thought to myself, "No, a good day will be when I call up there to ask this question and you tell me, the amount is zero, a good day will be when these funds are not needed now nor will they ever be needed because such things such as school lunch room debt does not exist.

Yes, I'll admit that Children's Sabbath is a soap box issue for me, Partly because my background is in Child Development. I know how critical a healthy and safe environment is to a child's development, how needed a strong educational foundation is for every child. It breaks my heart to know each and every day some

of the light found within a child's smile gets extinguished before it ever has a chance to shine due to circumstances which are beyond this little person's control.

I have no shame in admitting that on this particular Sunday every year I pull a little bit of pastor's privilege by using this pulpit to raise awareness for issues facing the children and youth of our community, of our nation and of our world. But maybe the main reason I do such a thing, stand up here on my soap box and bring our attention to the despair, to the hurt, to the injustices so many of our children and youth face is because I am a person of faith.

I am called, we are called to take care of the least of these. I am called, we are called to look out for the vulnerable in our midst by being a voice for the voiceless. As a person of faith, I am called, we are called to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's children, both young and old, so that God's Kingdom will be fully realized here on earth. And celebrating Children's Sabbath helps us to do just that.

It reminds me, remind us that this sacred call which we have all embraced as followers of Jesus Christ, is not a one time thing. It is not something we can pick up when it is convenient for us. This call to care, this call to nurture, this call to make justice and show mercy is a part of who we are. It is how we live out our

understanding of our faith as disciples of Christ. It is how we show our love for God by loving the least of these as ourselves.

Caring for the vulnerable is a deeply held Biblical value found both within the Old and New Testament. From Genesis to Revelation, there are verses upon verses, laid out in detail of how we are to care for the widows and orphans, how we are to welcome the refugee, and how we are to welcome the little children, made in the image of God. This is the core message of what Jesus taught and preached. Being a people of justice and hope is the very foundation upon which we build our faith...simply because it reflects the very character and nature of our God, our God who is steadfast in love, who is generous in all things and who is faithful from generation to generation. We don't have to look any further than this Isaiah text to know that this is true.

Here is why I say this... In this particular section of Isaiah, the people are in exile, wondering when God will remember them and bring them home. Isaiah tells the people, Good news! God has heard their pleas and has called forth someone to lead them. The community celebrates! Except that the person God has chosen for this task is not who the people expect. Instead of lifting up one of their own for this task, God has chosen an outsider, a Persian ruler named Cyrus. This person is the last person the people of Israel would ever hope for as someone who would do God's bidding.

Now we can't be too hard on the people of Israel for questioning this particular promise because, after all Cyrus has no connection to God. We are told within these verses that God has called Cyrus by name even though Cyrus does not know God. In fact, it is probably a safe bet for the people to assume that Cyrus has never heard any the stories of how God brought the world into being. Or how God has worked time and time again, to restore the people of God. It was probably a safe bet for the people to think Isaiah had lost his mind because how could this Persian King be God's anointed one when Cyrus was not part of the royal lineage of David. Cyrus was an outsider. He didn't fit the people's expectations. He was the least likely to be the one who would make justice, who would show mercy, who would restored them. Cyrus just didn't fit the picture of the one who would bring healing and wholeness for all of God's children

Which makes Isaiah's words all the more compelling for the people Israel and for us today. They remind the people, they remind us as modern day people of faith that "because of who God is, a God who is steadfast in love, who is generous in grace, a God who is faithful from generation to generation, Isaiah reminds the people that because of who God is, God will act and does act in surprising ways, using unexpected events, using unexpected people to restore God's people once more, to make justice and show mercy. God will use anyone and everyone, insider

and outsider, young and old, to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's creation. So why are we surprised that God is still doing the same thing today?

God is still speaking. God is still working. God is still calling the least likely people, children, adults, insiders and outsiders, God is still calling people like you and me to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's children.

God has heard the children's cries then and now. God is acting to bring comfort and hope to this broken and hurting world. God will not stop until all of God's children have enough to eat, until all of God's children have a roof over their heads. God will not stop bringing about healing and wholeness until all of God's children's lights shine bright with hope and love. God will not stop making justice and showing mercy until all of God's children no longer live in fear.

Because of who God is, a God who is loving and slow to anger, a God who is generous and gracious, a God who is faithful from generation to generation, Because of who God is, God will use any means necessary to achieve this outcome of wholeness for all of God's children, even using outsiders like Cyrus to do so, even using imperfect humans like you and me to do so, even going as far as sending God's own Son to us in the form of a little child so that this vision of peace, this vision of hope, this vision of reconciliation will come to fruition here on

Earth for all of God's children once more. God will not stop until all of God's children are restored and welcomed home once again.

Before we get overwhelmed and think this Kingdom vision is all up to us to bring to fruition, let me reassure everyone that it is not. Because I'll be the first to admit, that there are days I can barely take care of myself, let alone contemplate taking on solving all the world's problems. And on those particular days...okay, every day, I say a prayer and give thanks that God is God and I am not.

Which is why once again, Isaiah's words are so compelling to us. They reminds us that this whole Kingdom building thing is not up to you and me alone. Isaiah reminds Cyrus and us that although we are all called to be the vessel, it is the Lord who can and will do all these things."

You see, God is not asking Cyrus nor is God asking us to be anything we are not already...vessels through which God will act, hearts and hands who will show God's love to God's children. When we accepted the call to be followers of Jesus Christ, living out our call to care and nurture, God was simply asking us to open ourselves up to becoming God's agents of change in this world while our God moves us all forward with hope, while calling us to love all of God's children.

This is what gives us strength for the journey. This is what shines in the darkness. This is what gives us hope when we become overwhelmed by the

injustices we see in our world. As people of faith, we know that "We don't have to be perfect. We just need to be perfectly ready to act when we are called...ready to participate in God's plan of compassionate restoration for all of God's children."

We just need to be the heart and hands of our God in this world, working with our God to bring justice, to bring healing and wholeness, to be agents of hope and love in this world until all are welcomed and restored once more and beloved children of God once more.

We just need never forget that despite of what this world may or do, our God can and will do amazing things through us for the people of God. May it be so.

Amen.