

Advent 2  
Isaiah 11.1-10  
Matthew 3.1-12  
December 4, 2022

“Truth and mercy will meet; justice and peace will, kiss each other.” This passage from Psalm 85 was read while I was in Ireland. We were in Corymeela, the place in which reconciliation conversations begin in Northern Ireland, and one of the leaders of this center read this to us, suggesting that for reconciliation to happen we needed truth, mercy, justice and peace. Immediately after reading this, he had us count off into four groups. He took the first group to another room, leaving the rest of us to sort of stare at each other and wonder what our activity was going to be that day. He took the second group to another space, and we became more suspicious. By the time he took the third and left my group, we were convinced that we were competing. The leader returned and told us our word was “peace.” We had to decide why peace was necessary in reconciliation.

“We will have to argue that peace is the most important part! This is a debate!” one of my colleagues said, and we agreed. We spent probably ninety percent of our time in small group just defining peace. Was peace docile, and calm? Was it kindness? Was it passive? We agreed that peace was more than a lack of conflict, and that it could disrupt the status quo. Peace was related to truth telling, which sometimes is difficult to hear.

When the groups returned, we were ready. All of us sat on the edges of our seats, ready to argue why our word was “the best.” One group went first, and then another, all of us ready to battle for our word. The leader seemed confused, “I’m just looking for how you see this word,” he said, “you aren’t competing.”

We were all a bit confused. We thought we understood the assignment. When he divided us all up without explaining the instructions to each of us, we immediately became suspicious. We started plotting, and knew we would be the best. This was not his intention, and it took us a while to bring us back on track.

Even when the intention isn’t there, division makes us suspicious and competitive. When we categorize in our heads, we can begin to compete with one another. Too often we fight for our place in society without realizing it. Peace is disrupted when we have to fight for our resources, which is what our world has taught us to do. We have to be able to change the way in which we see the world in order to seek peace.

This disruption is exactly what our passages talk about today. Both the Hebrew scripture and our Gospel reading address disruptions in the world, which is a source of peace. We know our world is far from peace, so then why do we keep living our lives without change? Why do we think we can keep doing what we always have but the rest of the world will change?

My group in Corymeela discussed how peace was not just quietness or stillness. It could be discomfort and speaking out. Someone cited Jeremiah 6: “they have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying “peace, peace,” when there is no peace.” Sometimes we want peace so

badly, we proclaim peace when it doesn't exist. We displace our understanding of peace on others.

It is easy for us to look around after a divisive election, and think, "no one is stirring the pot. This is peaceful." It is easy for us to take a breath after a mass shooting and think, "ok, now we have peace." But for those who have lost loved ones? For those who grieve? For those who were wounded? Peace is not found. For those who caused the wounds, have they changed their actions? Peace without disruption is merely masked violence waiting to happen again. When we assume that peace exists when the hard work of reconciliation hasn't taken place, when reparation hasn't happened, then peace is an illusion. To condemn the violence of the shooting at Club Q and not address the systemic homophobia and transphobia in our world is merely allowing it to happen over and over again. To cry out in sadness after mass shootings in schools but not address the systemic gun problem in our country, to not change laws and policies means it will happen again.

The passage from Isaiah talks about a shift in the entire world. This isn't just a small, minor shift - this is a dramatic change in the world as we know it. When I think about this passage in Isaiah, I think of a line from Ghostbusters movie where they are trying to explain to the mayor that the city is under a supernatural attack. Bill Murray's character sarcastically says, "Cats and dogs, living together! Mass hysteria!" That is the scene here. Lions and lambs, living together, mass hysteria! It is the unimaginable. It is beyond what our finite minds can fathom. This is the work of the Spirit, the creative one who can imagine peace and reconciliation and redemption. This is the work of a God who takes a dead stump and disrupts that narrative of death and creates a branch growing out of the stump. All of God's work is turning the status quo on its head. Creation will live together. Instead of a power-hungry adult leader, a child, the most defenseless among us will be the leader.

This shift, this peace, affects more than humans. The entire earth, all of creation, will feel these holy repercussions. The shift will be felt by all, because our actions affect all the earth. It goes back to a major shift – a disruption. That if we don't disrupt our over-consumption, if we don't disrupt our energy use, if we don't disrupt the corporations who create environmental hazards, then we can't turn around climate change, and we can't care for creation.

In the Gospel reading John the Baptist is sent as a disrupter. He lived in the wilderness, made his clothes out of things he found, ate eccentric foods. I like to say he is that hippy uncle that everyone loves listening to and hearing stories from but in polite public people often turn away, perhaps because his truths are too difficult to hear. John the Baptist called out for repentance. He called out for change. And he does this unapologetically. He is preparing the way for Jesus. In order for people to really understand Jesus' work in the world they must first unlearn what they know, repent of their sins, repent of that which divides and creates friction, and be open to a new path.

Disruptions aren't always bad, though. Jesus came into the world in perhaps one of the more pleasant disruptions possible – as a baby. Babies are cute and cuddly and bring smiles, but they also completely disrupt one's schedule, and sleep, and lifestyle. Puppies can be fun disruptions. Perhaps you can think of other life events that are disrupting, but still holy.

Last week we talked about hope and living with intentionality. To keep awake is to be aware. When we are aware, when we see the injustices in the world, we realize that to make strides we must turn the world on its head. We cannot keep living as we did, because our entire perspective has changed. It is through this breaking free of the status quo that we are able to find soteria - salvation - liberation. The Greek word “soteria” isn’t in our passages today, but when we think of Christ coming to earth, as a baby or to return, it is often in the framework of salvation. Last week we wondered out loud, what are we to be saved from? So, I suggested another translation of “release” or “liberation.” Each time we celebrate Advent and look toward the peace that is promised, the peace that is to come, we are seeking a release from the world as it is, and a liberation to live in the world as it should be.

Keep awake, and continue to live with intention, knowing that for that liberation to occur we must be prepared for the disruption it causes. Amen.