

Proper 23
Year A 2020
Isaiah 25:1-9
Philippians 4:1-9

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Well, what a week it has been.

It seems to me more and more likely that the world is spinning off its axis.

Which felt appropriate over the course of the week
as I was working with today's readings.

Our first reading from Isaiah
is a part of Isaiah known as the Isaiah Apocalypse.

Coincidence??

Maybe, maybe not.

In the portion of the Isaiah Apocalypse
we read a few minutes ago,
we hear of Isaiah's testimony to God's wonderful transformation.

Isaiah testifies to a cosmically powerful and compassionate deity.
God has “done wonderful things.”

Another translation is God has “performed marvels”

God performs marvels as a part of the movement of history.

In the words of commentator Stephen Reid:

*The activist God shapes history and politics.
God is not now, nor has ever been,
an indifferent bystander in the course of God’s creation.*

We often find it difficult to think of God as a source of destruction.
but if we understand the city or state
as being the symbol of the concentration of power
it helps to frame the context of destruction.

As the destruction of the abuse of power.

Power oftentimes wielded in opposition
to the desire of the Creator
in favor of the powerful
resulting in the oppression and destruction of the vulnerable.

We see this clearly in Isaiah’s testimony today:

“...you have made the city a heap...” and

“.. cities of ruthless nations will fear you.”

And God's acts:

“For you have been a refuge to the poor;
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.”

Isaiah continues with his prophetic vision:

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts
will make for **all** peoples a feast of rich food.....
and he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over **all** peoples, **all** nations....”

This is the cosmically powerful and compassionate deity.

The Lord God who wipes away all tears from all faces.

But who is all?

All is all peoples, all nations, imperial or exiled.

And Isaiah further proclaims:

“this is our God”

“Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Salvation is one of the terms that can and is oftentimes misunderstood.

Evidence of this is that Marcus Borg dedicates an entire chapter on salvation in his book "Speaking Christian."

Particularly in Isaiah, salvation is meant to remind the Israelites of God's intervention in freeing them from bondage.

All bondage.

The exploitation and oppression they had experienced while they were exiled in Egypt.

Salvation from the denial of the God of Israel by the kings and power brokers who worshipped oppression for their own gain.

Isaiah paints the vision of the God who is always with the people of God because God knows them and identifies them as precious.

Those returning from exile would have known that God's salvation was not just coming back to specific geographic place but also a coming home to God.

What God has revealed and modeled for us is what we are called to do.

A blueprint is set forth in Paul's letter written to the community in Philippi.

A community at odds with each other.

The Christian community in Philippi was the westernmost Pauline church when it was founded.

In other words, it sits in the boonies comparatively speaking.

A community that is on its own without other close communities to support it.

This letter is written while Paul sits in prison awaiting trial.

Paul writes as one who has evolved from being a persecutor of those who chose the early church over Rome and the Emperors.

This by Paul's own admission.

So he writes to re-orient the church in Philippi:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything,
but in everything by prayer
and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.

Keep on doing the things that you have learned
and received and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you.

It is Paul's way of speaking of his homecoming in God.

His invitation to the church in Philippi to keep on that same journey.

To understand that God is always near
no matter the chaos that may swirl nearby.

It is Paul's subtle reminder that Jesus,
God and the newly emerging church will always feel tension.

The tension that comes from not acquiescing to the powers that be.

Yesterday, we concluded the 133rd annual Diocesan convention,
virtually of course.

Bishop Kym reminded us
that we are called to God's vision for all creation.

The call that will lead us home
to that peace which comes from
actively engaging in working to overturn injustice.

This way of being which is so different from
the anxiety of the world around us
is at the heart of the church.

It is the knowledge that we can share with the world around us
that God is always with us, no matter the circumstance.

That God that stands firmly
in opposition to oppression or exploitation of any kind.

We have the power to make known
the God that lies in the center of every being
who calls us to peace.

Calls us to show our neighbors a different way, a higher way.

So the question I believe for us is:

Do we dare?

Do we dare to show our neighbors a higher way?