

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
December 10, 2017
Mark 1:1-8

“Comfort, o comfort my people, says your God.” These words from the prophet Isaiah are given to us over and over each Advent. What if I just stopped here and we let those words soak in for the rest of my sermon time? Would it change who we are, what we believe and how we act?

Do we really believe these words? That God is a God of comfort, of peace? Do we believe what Jesus came to proclaim - that all are forgiven, there is nothing we can do to make God reject us, and that when difficult things happen, we are not being punished?

Or do we still cling to a pre-Isaiah view of God – a God who is punitive – an authority we have to appease, beg for forgiveness from, and pay a penalty to?

This week’s readings are full of images from the natural world that speak to the kind of God who claims our hearts. In Isaiah we hear how God will appear in the world when the world is prepared. “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low: the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” In bible study on Wednesday we explored the possibilities of what these images could mean.

Does the leveling out of the topography of the world suggest that when God comes, in God’s desire to reach us and be with us, that

nothing will stand in God's way? That God takes the quickest short cut to reach us? Nothing stops God in God's desire to be in relationship with us?

Or is the image of a radically altered world an attempt to describe how different the world will be when Jesus comes to bring the good news that everything is forgiven, nothing is lost, and love is the essence of God? That everything will be turned upside down? What seems impermanent will become changed in a flash, and power will be expressed through kindness and vulnerability?

And the barriers that keep us from the love and knowledge of God – are they bad things? For instance, do we see a mountain as a difficulty, overwhelming or as a challenge, an opportunity? If we land on the top of a mountain by helicopter, we may enjoy the view. But if we hike up it, digging deep into ourselves to find the strength to make it to the top, the view we get is different, somehow. We appreciate the view but we also appreciate what it took to climb up to the heights. We appreciate the delicious reprieve as we sit down on an outcrop of stone, taking our pack off and stretching out our legs. Blessed relief. And our snack tastes like ambrosia of the gods. Ahhhhh. Maybe we want to stay but we need to head back down; our loved ones are waiting, our day-to-day life awaits our care and attention.

And the valleys. They might be cool, easy to travel through, full of life – trees, plants, fruits. Lush and colourful. And as we travel through, after a while, our eyes rise above the colour and life to seek out the peak of that next mountain. We're ready for another

challenge. Living in ease and luxury are fine for a time, but we are curious – we have more to learn about ourselves, our God, and so we strike out to climb the next peak, for the next view that expands our sense of how great the world is, how much we have to learn, and how our yearning will always bring us up again, to get as close to God as we can.

And all the time we are busy climbing, and relaxing, stretching ourselves and rejuvenating, we are waiting. We are waiting for the day when all the ups and downs of our lives will be over and the God we seek will be standing there, welcoming us with open arms.

Why do we have to wait? Why not here, now?

Peter's letter tells us today, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but ***all to come to repentance.***"

Is this why we are waiting? So the Lord will come and find us all having finally responded to John's cry, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." That all of us will have repented and removed the barriers from our hearts that keep God at bay?

If we have been freed from fear, if we all have acknowledged God as Creator and sustainer and we all are filled to overflowing with gratitude and praise, what will the Lord have to judge?

Perhaps this is why we wait, patiently, actively, so that in God's time after we have cleansed our hearts and minds, the Lord will return to a world transformed, a world no longer recognizable

because love and forgiveness will have replaced revenge and greed, and the patience of our Lord will be rewarded?

These are just some thoughts that rose up in our bible study this week. We allowed the images from the readings today to stir our imaginations and quicken our hearts. So that once again, we hear these beautiful Advent readings in a way that builds hope and desire for that peace we are promised – that peace that passes all understanding. That peace that comes from knowing and trusting that God so loved this world, and gave it the most precious gift of all – the life, death and resurrection of love incarnate.

So as we sink into that knowledge that God desires peace for us, that God would melt our hearts with love, that God reaches out to us beyond time and space..... let us extend to others this season that sense of peace. Let us be comfort to those around us.

For each time we offer the handshake of peace, (as we will in a few minutes) we offer the promise of God, through his son Jesus Christ. And that, my friends, is a holy offering.

And like John, every time we do something, with the presence of God in our hearts, we point beyond ourselves, to the One who is more powerful than we are, the One we are invited into full communion with, the One who yearns for reconciliation, peace and joy for all God's creation.

Amen.

