

Pastor Roy's sermon from December 1, 2013

Advent 1

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah sees a bright future, "In the days to come," nations will come to Yahweh to learn of the goodness of peace and justice, to learn to walk in God's paths. The word of the Lord will flow to the nations and God's people will be God's voice.

Isaiah's call goes out, "Let us walk in the light of God."

It takes nerve to talk about a new future—a good future—a better future. Change is difficult, but to bring about positive change? Great effort, great energy is required.

Isaiah's prophesy is a vision of God's coming reign already begun. Visions require us as community and individuals to change our actions even though we have no guarantee of results. When God calls us to be light for peace and justice, we don't know what kind of an impact our simple efforts might have. We fear sacrifice ending in disappointment. Perhaps someone else will swallow up our sacrifice for their benefit and we will lose out. Perhaps our hard work will be wasted.

Isn't that why we sometimes hold back from fully trusting in the just and peaceful reign of God? Perhaps we will do our part and others will not? How much can we afford to give of ourselves? How much energy for justice can we pour out? How much aid for relief to the poor can we give?

How much energy for justice did the prophets expend? Were they always successful in the eyes of their contemporaries? Were they misunderstood? Assumed to be fools?

Their faith in justice and peace was just that: Faith. They did not necessarily see much of a positive result. The poor were still poor. The prophets were still poor. Were they accomplishing anything in real terms?

Or did it even matter whether they were wildly successful? Was it not worth it to live and proclaim a peace that began inwardly and resulted in subtle changes? Inward changes which created peace of mind. . .and personal hope. . .and hope in the community? To create just spaces and moments of peace, even if the entire nation was not transformed and may never be transformed?

They loved justice with their words and actions. They made a difference. It was certainly better than if they had just floated downstream with all the rest, blindly thrashing about after their own perceived needs and desires. No, they paddled upstream, against the easy current, they upheld the reign of God as a life which they and others could live. They left the world a better place than they found it.

Paul the apostle, another prophet, calls us to wake up and put on the armor of light—the Good News of Jesus Christ. God's mercy for all calls us to live in mercy and to welcome the stranger in the fullness of compassion and peace. In the end, everyone benefits when we live in justice and discover peace. We meet the Son of Man when we live his reign. The reign of merciful justice which brings peace.

Compassionate choices lift the spirits of everyone. The choice to help a neighbor. Learning about the difficulties of others and praying for them. Supporting a trustworthy relief organization such as

Lutheran World Relief or New Hope Ministries where you know the money will go primarily to relief efforts rather than funding campaigns or well paid executives. Getting together with someone you haven't seen or met for quite some time.

Living in the light of God's justice is not about doing impossible things, but simple gestures which lift up the dispirited and build bridges of hope. Our efforts might or might not make a big difference, but if we begin or strengthen friendships, we are well on our way to living the prophets' dreams and visions.

Advent is just this, living God's justice—lifting up the economically, spiritually, and emotionally poor. As we do so, we are watching for Christ, waiting for the him who draws us all together into unity, into mercy, into the love of God.

Let us actively wait for Christ this Advent. Thanks be to God. Amen.