

Thursday – December 4, 2014

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

Psalm 85:10-11

Earlier in this psalm, the psalmist has invited God to restore Israel. This would not be the first such restoration. It is, in fact, the memory of previous restorations that allows the psalmist to view the possibility of being restored with such positive anticipation. God has been a difference maker in the past and the invitation is extended for God to do it again.

The picture that is painted of a future restoration involves a meeting between love and faithfulness. There is no mention of what they might talk about in their meeting. Meanwhile, righteousness and peace are off to the side kissing. We have long known that true peace would require righteousness, but we never knew that they were “an item.” Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, while righteousness looks down from the sky. Certainly, God would like to see these attributes coming from those on the ground, but maybe being showered from above and grounded from below will bring us to that point.

It is significant that the psalmist envisions the things that are most needed coming to life. Faithfulness, peace, righteousness, and love are all personified. The claim is being made that the Israel and all others in the world would benefit if goodness became a person and lived among us. At that time, it seemed like a good idea. At this time, it is our central theme. We need God walking with us.

Living God,

You have, indeed, walked among us. You continue to keep your promise to always be with us. May we walk in such confidence that your presence empowers us to bring righteousness, peace, love, and faithfulness to your people.

By Your Power,

Amen



Friday – December 5, 2014

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you...” Jeremiah 1:6-7

Surprisingly, these words come immediately after one of the most quoted callings in all of the scriptures. God has announced to Jeremiah that he has been known even before conception. His consecration occurred prior to birth. Instead of immediately celebrating this news, Jeremiah’s first words are words of hesitation. He is not alone in this. Moses cited his stuttering, disciples announced a family funeral, Sarah pointed out her advanced age, and you and I named our own versions of “I AM ONLY.”

“I am only” is our self pronouncement of “not enough.” Whether noting our gender, our stature, our insolvency, or our level of education, we hear God calling and respond “I AM ONLY.” In this moment, we seem to forget that God is fully aware of what we are “only.” God, who knew each of us before conception sees all that we are and all that we can be.

Throughout the Bible, God has a saying that sounds very close to ours. Instead of “I am only”, God reiterates “I AM.” In the face of every question of identity, capacity, or power, the God of creation and the Savior of the

world respond “I AM.” As we walk with Jesus, who comes to redeem us, we can traverse the gap between “I am only” and “I am.”

God of Being,

Enlarge our view of ourselves, so that we can enlarge our understanding of your calling. Use us to do great things, because we can, by your power.

In Faithfulness,

Amen

Saturday – December 6, 2014

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do them?”

Mark 11:27-28

The questions from the temple officials were rhetorical. There was no answer that could have actually sufficed. They knew that, in terms of their stated policies and practices, Jesus was acting without appropriate authority. Jesus knew it too, but never sought authorization from temple officials or anyone else.

In the 1955 play “Guys and Dolls”, a gambler named Sky Masterson said “One of these days in your travels, a guy is going to show you a brand new

deck of cards on which the seal is not yet broken. Then the guy is going to offer to bet you that he can make the jack of spades jump out of this brand new deck and squirt cider in your ear. But, son, do not accept this bet, because as sure as you stand here, you're going to wind up with an ear full of cider." Sky Masterson teaches us that we cannot let others define us, nor should we "play their games."

Jesus knew better than to "play the officials' games." Instead, he posed a question to them. He said that he would answer their questions if they could answer his. He claimed authority over the conversation and inserted "his game." This is appropriate because Jesus is not one who is granted authority. He is the grantor of authority.

God of Authority,

You have granted us permission to speak of your Kingdom. You have allowed us to claim your name. Because of your authority, we can convey to all the love of Jesus.

By His Name,

Amen

Sunday – December 7, 2014

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Isaiah 40:1 KJV

On yesterday, we participated in the annual performance of the Cleveland Messiah Chorus. Each year, the concert is held to present Handel's great work "Messiah." The Gospel story is told in musical renderings of significant scriptures. Part one of the three segments of this masterpiece draws heavily from Isaiah 40.

The first words sung are in a solo for a tenor which offers "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." The tenor goes on to promise "Every valley shall be exalted." This leads the entire assemblage to stand and proclaim "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." Finally, in selection number nine, the alto and the chorus combine to assert "O thou that tallest good tidings to Zion, get thee

up to a high mountain and say to the cities of Judah 'behold your God'."

Without speaking in the vernacular of the biblical days, or of the 18th century English translation of this scripture, we are still called upon to proclaim the goodness and presence of God. Our "high mountain" may be the internet or some other expression of electronic communication. Our purpose remains to be the comforting of God's people. In every generation, God desires comfort for the people of God. Jesus comes not only as the fulfillment of Isaiah's words of prophesy, but with the same purpose, the comforting of God's people.

Exalted Lord,

You send us messengers to offer us comfort and we are glad. Call us beyond our comfort, to godly action, for we know that we too are your messengers. We thank you for all who have come or will come, especially, Jesus, our Lord.

In His Name,

Amen

Monday – December 8, 2014

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1

In seminary training, students are often asked to identify their warrant. A theological warrant is not unlike a warrant for your arrest. In the case of an arrest warrant, a person can be arrested pursuant to the authority

of the grantor of the warrant. The arrest is based upon this authority. In the case of theological warrants, our beliefs or claims are based upon whatever causes us to embrace these claims or beliefs. Most believers offer scripture as a warrant.

The psalmist identifies the Lord as a warrant. The Lord is named as the psalmist's "stronghold for life," that is, the ultimate source of all strength. With such a source, the psalmist asks, in utter disregard of the identity or nature of any antagonists, "of whom shall I be afraid?" The assumption and theological claim is that God is capable of delivering the psalmist, and us, from any attack or opposition.

Like the psalmist, each of us will continue to face opposition throughout our lives. With faith comparable to that of the psalmist, we can be confident in advance. Without detailing exactly what or who will challenge us, we can know that we have what it takes to face each challenge. This is the salvation that comes to us, during Advent and beyond.

Guiding Light,

We face opposition at every turn, but we do not continue to fear. Our plans and our identities are frequently questioned, but we know who we are. Because we trust in you, we can live boldly and confidently. For this we give thanks.

In Your Care,

Amen





Tuesday – December 9, 2014

Though an army encamp against, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet will I be confident. Psalm 27:3

Because this psalm is well stated and feels good to speak, it is cherished and often quoted. We use it to fend off countless ordinary struggles. When it rains on our picnics, we quote it. When we miss our usual bus, we call forth the warning to encamping armies. We bravely assert that our hearts are not afraid, when our lunch order is messed up. Having spoken with such boldness, real problems emerge and we fall apart. We lack the perspective of the psalmist.

The presumed writer of this psalm actually had armies to encamp against him. Wars were aimed specifically in his direction, one led by his son Absalom. He experienced sitting at the dinner table, when Saul decided that throwing a spear at him would be a good “mixer.” The challenges faced by David, at every stage of life, were anything but ordinary.

We can continue to claim this psalm. We can, if we choose, claim it with deeper meaning. The words that we have applied to our small challenges hold true, even in the case of earth shaking difficulties. God is not limited. Our perspectives have been.

Boundless God,

Deliver us from armies and opponents, large and small. We need to know you, in everyday affairs, and to call upon you in the case of life changing events. Gladly, you are up to any challenge.

In Reliance,

Amen

Wednesday – December 10, 2014

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Psalm 27:13

Throughout the world, packages sit with notes which say, do not open until Christmas. In some cases, those who know their family members well enough recognize that this will only occur if the packages are hidden. Such packages are stashed in closets, attics, automobile trunks, and even homes of others. All of this becomes necessary because some of us find it impossible to wait for the proper time.

Our impatience would be understandable or even cute, except that we are equally impatient with other matters. In our insistence to discover even the things that we are expressly forbidden to know, we open mail, peek in medicine cabinets, listen to private conversations, and even ask questions of those whose privacy we are disrespecting.

Even though these ethical breaches are less acceptable than sniffing out Christmas presents, they are only symptomatic of a larger concern. When we become unwilling to wait for what is coming (or not), we reject the idea of Kairos. Kairos, which is understood to mean God’s time or the fullness of time, is not expressed in terms of chronology, but in terms of propriety. On many biblical occasions, Israel chose a reckless course of action, rather than to wait for God. We have continued this behavior in our own time. Waiting for the Lord displays more than patience. It says that we submit to God’s Lordship and acknowledge our dependence.

Punctual Lord,

Your time is the right time. We accept that, even when curiosity seeks to overwhelm us. We would rather wait for your blessings than to hurry to receive what any other can offer us. Take your time, Lord.

In Surrender,

Amen

Thursday – December 11 2014

Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. Habakkuk 2:2

Countless sermons have been preached, using this verse as the basis by which a new ministry or a new emphasis is presented to a congregation. On some occasions, the message is accompanied by an elaborate written rendering of this new venture. Sometimes there are banners or flyers. The assumption seems to be that better graphics imply a better vision. This assumption probably agrees with what some understand the text to say. We are to write the vision so clearly and so large that it can be read by runners, as they pass.

Even though most of our congregations would be well served by revamping their promotion and publicity approaches, scripture is seldom concerned with public relations. We have too often relied on marketing our visions, rather than making sure that we have properly



discerned a vision. Many of our programs and campaigns fail not because the signage was too small, but because we were promoting the wrong vision.

It is telling that we so embrace verse 2 of this chapter. Verse 1 is not nearly as popular, but it is there that the commitment is made to seek the vision from God. It reads "...I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint." Verse 3 advises that there is a vision which should be awaited even if it tarries. The vision that we are to write on huge placards is the vision of God. We are to make it plain and to abide by it.

God of Vision,

Reveal to us what our governing vision can and must be. We can never do your work without hearing from you. Show us your plan and the places that each of us is called to occupy. We are your work force. Employ us.

In Compliance,

Amen

Friday – December 12 2014

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14



As we prepare for the birth of Christ, we read of Paul's aspirations to live into the resurrection of Christ. One could wonder is this an oversight by the lectionary team, but I believe that it is thematically connected. We and Israel have spent lives and generations awaiting the coming of Christ, whether into the world or into our hearts. We believe that, when He comes, we will be made more complete. Paul is at a different point in chronology, but seeking the same wholeness.

He acknowledges that he has not made it his own. This is a dual admission. Firstly, he confesses that he is still aspiring, having not yet arrived. He wants all that life in Christ has to offer, as we do. Secondly, there is the awareness that the outcome is not in his hands solely or entirely. Our best efforts still require God's actions. We are the created, not the creators.

Paul's personal strategy, in aspiring to these things, serves us well. It is necessary that we allow the past to be the past. No future destination can be located in our rear view mirror or in our congregational anniversary book. We must not only look to what lies ahead, but to "press on" toward our heavenly call and any earthly callings that God has for us.

God of Wholeness,

Show us your calling and the path to fulfilling it. We seek to be all that you desire for us. Let us know that every change and all of our growth resides in the future.

In Faithful Striving,

Amen

Saturday – December 13 2014

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for the sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. Psalm 126:5-6

In most cases, scriptures about restoration have to do with the sins of those seeking to be restored. This text reminds us of the need to be restored



from what has befallen us. It is good to know that God issues no-fault policies for those who have been victims of circumstances. This is essential in a world where "stuff happens."

The text is a celebration of the willingness to push through. In the face of too much or too little rain during the planting season, we must push through. When the economy seems to be on an endless sliding board, we push through. When it appears that our troops are only home long enough to get a change of clothes, the children of God push through. Every instance of pushing through does not result in a breakthrough, but every breakthrough is the result of pushing through.

The psalm asks of God that there be more breakthroughs. It is assumed that the faithful will persist in their efforts, but God is the one who can assure the harvest. Our harvest is not only agricultural. It consists of the fruits of all of our faithful efforts. We sing with gusto of "bringing in the sheaves."

Lord of Results,

We thank you for your blessing of our efforts. We will strive, but we need you to make our harvest bountiful. Inundate us with your outcomes.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

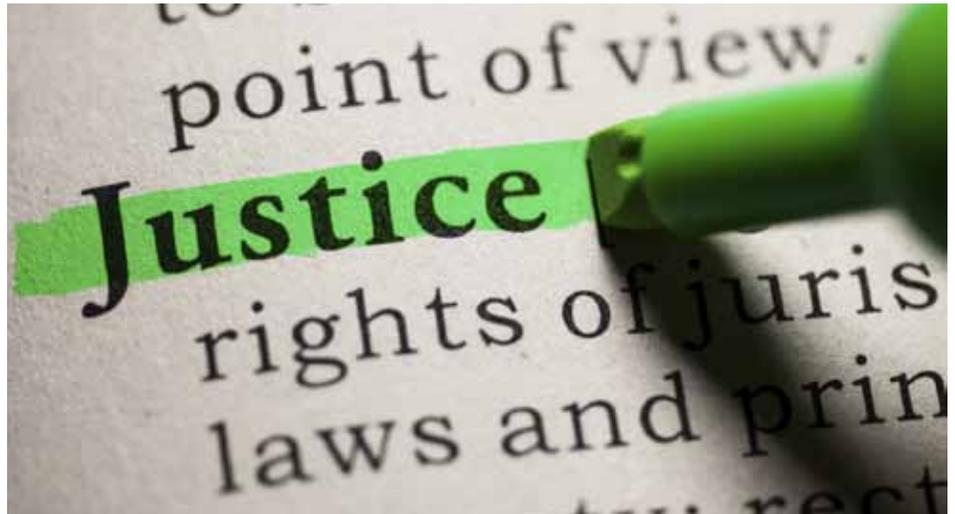
Sunday – December 14 2014

...and they shall rebuild the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former desolation and renew the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations. Isaiah 61:4 AMP

In our home we have several television shows we like to watch. We especially like the shows in which old and outdated homes are restored. The renovation of old homes has become the way to go. We still recall the days when purchasing a new home was the preferred norm. Today, most people cannot afford the budget for all the things of desire in a new home. Since new owners are looking to get more for their money they must seriously consider taking on a restoration project.

It takes vision and patience to restore a home. Convincing buyers to even consider restoration is a major task. After convincing the buyers to go with the renovation, keeping and holding their trust throughout the process is a major task. Anything and everything is at risk. At some point during the process, the ability to see into the future is what is needed. In the end everything usually comes together in televised restorations. At that point, one can easily see the value of restoration.

Advent comes, just in time to renew our strength and to restore our joy so that we can push on. Like the homes on the television, we need to be restored. We could be afraid except for one thing. The thought of seeing the newborn baby is all the fuel we need to keep moving forward.



Gracious and ever faithful God,

You provide us a glimpse of the future as you gently guide us on, even when everything around us screams no, a baby comes alone and changes everything.

Patiently,

Amen

Monday – December 15 2014

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm... Ephesians 6:13-14a

Making decisions is a part of life. We make decisions daily. Some decisions are small and do not have a lot of meaning or significance. Some decisions are life changing. A decision may say a lot about who you are as a

person. It can describe your integrity and your character. The decision to stand up for injustices against others can be life changing as well as life giving. Standing with our decisions against the attacks of others can be very difficult.

Speaking up for others is not something one does just when it is convenient or comfortable. "Hands off, it's not my problem" seems to be the popular response of the day. It is also the easy route to take. Advent is a reminder that who we are, as Christians, has meaning beyond the seasonal greeting and a few coins or dollars in the collection envelope for Christmas blessings. What we have to give is not always monetary.

The families that receive the blessing of dinners at Christmas receive the message that someone in this world cares about them. The same people receive a totally different message when you sit down at the table with that person. You then send a message beyond care. You send a message of genuine care and love. This is a message of acceptance that warms their heart and brings not only a feeling of hope, but genuine joy.

Lord of Joy,

Give me the strength and courage that I need to stand against unrighteousness toward others. Help me to bring hope, joy and peace through acts of genuine love.

In Christ,





Min. Sheila Spencer

Director of Christian Education and Faith Formation
Assistant to the President of Disciples Home Missions

Telephone: (317) 713-2634

E-mail: sspencer@dhm.disciples.org

Wilma Shuffitt

Ministry Associate

Telephone: (317) 713-2639

E-mail: wshuffitt@dhm.disciples.org



www.discipleshomemissions.org