

December 5/21 Transcript - 2nd Sunday in Advent - Pastor Bart Coleman

Grace and peace to you from God our creator the Christ who was, who is, who is to come and the Spirit who gathers us and gifts us.

We have before us a formula. Did you catch all of those place, names and individual names of rulers. Those are there for a reason. Luke telegraphs to us that we are in the presence of a prophet, John the Baptist. We heard the song and we sang it together today the song that his father, Zechariah, sang. John the Baptist you think, oh yeah, the guy with the hair shirt, right. Eats all the locusts and wild honey and he scolds people, Ah, there's so much more to this prophet. Prophets speak on behalf of God and this prophet John the Baptist speaks a word of hope. Okay this next bit is going to get a little weird so buckle up because I'm going to be preaching a sermon about a sermon about a prophet that's quoted from 800 years before...okay you see where we're going maybe. Hang on!

John the Baptist quotes directly from the prophet Isaiah and the place from which he quotes, in Isaiah scroll, that, too, matters because Isaiah, who had done a little scolding, yes he had, now begins to see that the exiles may get to now come home. And so he opens that 40th chapter "comfort my people, comfort". Some of you may have in earlier days memorized part of this chapter or maybe you have wall art that says, "They who wait upon the Lord shall have their strength renewed. That we will be lifted up like eagles. That we will run and not be weary. We will walk and not faint". There is a word there a hope for enduring the hard times and there's no promise that we won't get tired and there's no promise that we won't be discouraged. But there is the promise God is with us and that's where our strength comes from.

As I'm looking at you, I don't think any of you would bear any resemblance to my popular imagination of John the Baptist or other

prophets. But you are because prophets speak on God's behalf. And if I can borrow from the words of Saint Francis who says, " Preach the gospel at all times", and if you have to use words, sometimes we do, but sometimes it's our actions that matter and that's I think what Jim spoke to this morning. That when somebody's angry and their blood sugar has tanked, a breakfast sandwich is hope.

Earlier this week our snow that came and went so quickly, I decided I'd better get out and shovel. So I'm out shovelling, I've since learned maybe if I wait a day it'll go away and I don't have to worry about it but as I was shovelling a man was walking in the path that I had not yet cleared and I felt kind of bad, because I thought I wished I had come out sooner so he wouldn't had to walk through this wet snow and I looked down and he was wearing tennis shoes. And I asked him, " Are you able to keep your feet dry in this?". And he went on to tell a story about the boots that he had that were just so threadbare and so torn up that the tennis shoes were his best option. But the more he talked the more I thought this person is kind of like the exiles that Isaiah speaks a word of hope too. He was at that point where he thought nobody really cared. He spoke about wishing that his living conditions were better, but not sensing great responsiveness from his community. He felt let down. There are people who can speak a word of hope. I told my wife while all I could do was listen and smile and try to be kind, but I felt kind of powerless. What sort of hope could I offer? Thanks be to God that this is not a DIY, do it alone project, this being a bearer of hope, but we do this as community. Anytime we give that breakfast sandwich; that cup of coffee; that word of encouragement; those nice knitted toques that one of our members does through the whole course of a year; the food that we collect; that's preaching a sermon. A sermon of hope, a gospel of good news that salvation healing does indeed come to all people.

For some this has been a very difficult week. Maybe in your personal health journey it's been difficult. Certainly, as we read the newspaper headlines, newspaper that's kind of an anachronism isn't

it, as we read the online news reports, sadly, about children carrying automatic weapons into schools. Maybe we feel a bit hopeless, a bit disconnected and we feel a bit like the exiles. I'm reminded of preachers particularly from the black churches in the US who about a year ago began to sound this refrain. I quote from a preacher named Tracy Blackman. She opened a conference for preachers by saying, "We're done. We're done". This against the backdrop of things like the death of George Floyd, the difficulties and the unrest in the city's Portland and Minneapolis, but also in the disproportionate burden that some carry for not only climate disaster but for the pandemic because as much as we encourage vaccines they're not making their way all around the world. And so preachers like her and Otis Moss III would say "We're done." But they weren't done it because then they would say in the very next breath, "but God is not done" that God brings healing that God brings hope that God brings hope that God brings salvation and so I quote their appeal.

That as hope bearers in the season of advent that we remember God is indeed with us. That God is for us and we look to the one who brings a piece that the world cannot bring, this Prince of Peace brings salvation, healing and hope for all flesh. Amen