

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent – “Peace”

Isaiah 40:1-11

“A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’”

“For Crying Out Loud!”

Communities in England used to have an official “Town Crier”. Dressed in their special outfit, their job was to walk the streets, ringing a bell or banging on a gong, and crying out in a loud voice proclamations, announcements or news for the community.

Long before Town Criers, there were Prophets, who were employed not be the king or local government, but by God.

Fredrick Buechner says: **“The prophets were drunk on God, and in the presence of their terrible tipsiness, no one was ever comfortable. With a total lack of tact, they roared out against phoniness and corruption wherever they found them. They were the terror of kings and priests.”**

Prophets did not want the job and often when called by God, they tried to make excuses to avoid having to speak and act on God’s behalf.

Fortunately (or unfortunately) they found the courage to speak. as we hear Isaiah doing so this morning.

Like a Town Crier, Isaiah is called to deliver a message to the people: “A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?”

That, my friends, is a very good question for us to ask.

In this season of Advent, “What shall we cry out?” in the midst of the global pandemic that is impacting our daily lives while killing hundreds of thousands of people?

What shall we cry out in the hallways of hospitals that are overflowing with people stricken with the Coronavirus and the healthcare providers who are being stretched to the breaking point?

What shall we cry in the hospices and care facilities, who care for the dying or in the funeral homes and churches who seek to find creative new ways to comfort families who grieve the death of their loved ones?

What shall we cry in the midst of the rise of White Supremacy and hate groups in our nation?

What shall we cry in the midst of the epidemic of gun violence that continues to infect our nation?

What shall we cry in the face of the growing numbers of people living in poverty or on the streets or who are hungry, increasing the demands at local food pantries?

What shall we cry out the virtual spaces people or social media places people are gathering in now?

Shall we cry out with words of anger, self-righteousness, and hatred? Should we too join our voices with these who cry out in this way?

Shall we cry words of blame, while pointing our fingers or even assault rifles at those we feel are responsible for creating the problems we feel we are facing in our world, threatening to do violence against those we disagree with because of the color of their skin, the language they speak, their culture, or political and religious beliefs?

Shall we cry out with words that on the surface seem to be well intentioned, but really are hollow and empty, because it all seems so hopeless and futile anyhow.

Or maybe, we should just stay silent, unsure of what we should say?

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said: **“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”**

Dr. King seem to know what to cry out and when to do so, even when it cost him his life.

A voice says, “Cry out” and we, who do not feel like we are qualified to speak any prophetic word on God’s behalf, hesitantly ask - “What shall we cry?”

How about crying out God’s Word that still lives and moves among us, within us, and all around us, which is God’s Holy Word born again and again into the world; the one Word we are preparing for anew, each day, in each human relationship, and in all places; a Word that brings healing, hope, justice, compassion, mercy and peace to all people, and to you and to me?

Of this word, Karoline Lewis, who is Associate Professor of Preaching at Luther Seminary in St. Paul says: **“The beginning of the good news happens in the middle of nowhere -- and not in the center of power.”**

This is where Isaiah cries out his words of comfort and hope this morning. With Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians, many of the people of Judea had been living in Exile. Hope was not the first word spoken to these people by Isaiah, judgement was. But now, beginning in Isaiah 40, the cry of

the prophet shifts to one of redemption, hope and the promise of way back to God. "Comfort, comfort, my people...speak tenderly to Jerusalem," cries the prophet. Make straight the path in wilderness that leads you home to God!

To cry out this word, one must have courage to risk even their lives.

In crying out on God's behalf, we are challenged to speak compassionately, empathetically, mercifully, and faithfully, God's word that engage and connect us in hope, healing our brokenness and divisions, while uniting us in God's love, and bringing peace in our hearts and world.

This is the word I believe Isaiah was inviting the people to cry out together by living into this new vision of God's Shalom.

Writer Jan Richardson shares this vision of peace in the midst of chaos and violence:

"Blessing in a Time of Violence"

Which is to say  
this blessing  
is always.

Which is to say  
there is no place  
this blessing  
does not long  
to cry out  
in lament,  
to weep its words  
in sorrow,  
to scream its lines  
in sacred rage.

Which is to say  
there is no day  
this blessing ceases  
to whisper  
into the ear  
of the dying,  
the despairing,  
the terrified.

Which is to say  
there is no moment  
this blessing refuses  
to sing itself  
into the heart  
of the hated  
and the hateful,  
the victim  
and the victimizer,

with every last  
ounce of hope  
it has.  
Which is to say  
there is none  
that can stop it,  
none that can  
halt its course,  
none that will  
still its cadence,  
none that will  
delay its rising,  
none that can keep it  
from springing forth  
from the mouths of us  
who hope,  
from the hands of us  
who act,  
from the hearts of us  
who love,  
from the feet of us  
who will not cease  
our stubborn, aching  
marching, marching  
until this blessing  
has spoken  
its final word,  
until this blessing  
has breathed  
its benediction  
in every place,  
in every tongue:  
Peace.  
Peace.  
Peace.

— Jan Richardson