

Advent II Year C 2015

A word about prophecy....Advent after all is the season of prophecy. In our culture, prophecy is usually described as the ability to predict the future. In the church when we talk about prophecy, we think of God speaking to Abraham and his wife Sarah in their barrenness, telling them that their progeny will become a great nation; Of Joseph speaking of the coming blight and famine in Egypt; Of Saul prophesying that young David will become a great king... Of Jeremiah lamenting over the corrupt leadership of Israel which, because of its unjust and callous indifference, will be its undoing....and mostly, particularly in this season, we think of the prophet Isaiah prophesying of the one, a little child, who will lead Israel to a new found freedom; of Gabriel speaking to Mary about her bearing a child who is God's son... and of her suffering, and his to come. When the light wanes, it seems, prophets come out of the woodwork.

I encountered one such prophet just the other night at Greer's Downtown Market. I stopped by for something on my way home from work... Greer's is something of a social experience... there is loud banter along the aisles... people visiting, more than they are shopping... It is mostly low income people there... people worn and seasoned with the rigors of life... As I was standing in the check-out line an older man in a wheelchair approached me. He was overweight. His clothes were worn and a little tattered. His eyes were glazed with cataracts. I had on my clerical garb so he knew I was a priest. He told me he had been preaching at his church for some forty years... He asked me which church was mine, and I told him. He said, "after all these years, I know just one thing" "What is that?" I asked. "The world just ain't the way God would have it", he said. It just ain't the way God would have it. So I checked out and left the store... back into the dark... and he too, I assume... back into the dark world from which he came.

Here's the thing about prophets... They don't predict the future... They speak the truth... and the truth they speak encompasses past, present, and future... and the other thing about prophets... they speak from the margins of life, the underside, from the dark chaos that leans on our world.... Prophets speak to us from the wilderness... from the dangerous regions of existence, in which life is stripped of all illusion... It is a landscape in which in order to survive one must turn around and look at one's humanity for what it is, and for what it is not. If we are paying attention, we are all prophets in the wilderness.

So what do we make of this prophecy we just read for today? Luke is of course quoting Isaiah, that the low places along the journey will be filled... and the mountainous challenges will be brought low, and the crooked paths made straight.... In other words all of life's complications and complexities fade in the face of God's intention that all things will be redeemed and restored.... That is the prophetic wisdom true from the beginning... How does the prophet know this? Because the prophet is paying attention to the signs of the times, to the lore handed down through the generations... paying attention, in short... the prophet sees and knows because of the patterns of history, which one may interpret as the pattern of God in earth... The overarching prophecy continuous in the lore of Israel is that goodness and wellbeing and freedom always come on the heels of ruin and despair... How do we know that? Because that is the way God would have it, has had it... and will have it.... It is the truth.

Brothers and sisters, this coming of Christ, the incarnation of God in earth, implies us as well. The incarnation is not a once upon a time thing. It occurs in every generation. There are always the ones raised up to tell the truth, an act for it. Baptism then is not just an initiation into the life of faith, but it is testimony to the incarnation as ongoing... At every baptism Christ is born into the world.... Born into the world to be driven into the wilderness, the dark corners of the human community... driven out bearing all the gifts humankind possesses... Reason, compassion, empathy, imagination, kindness... driven into the wilderness to raise up those worn and seasoned by the dark... The responsibility of salvation rests on us, friends of God.... It is the Advent of God's people coming to change the world that we celebrate in this dark season... because the ancient prophecy is there, waiting out there, for the claiming... We claim that love is stronger than death... that good will overcome evil....that truth is inevitable... It is the most noble vocation.

So an admonition for you this Advent... Pay attention to the voices coming from the wilderness... the worn and tattered voices that speak with the authority of God... Take courage and go into the wilderness, and leave your illusions there. It is in the wilderness where God makes a habit of showing up.... Seek your God in the dark, because it is from the darkness that God offers a word of hope... and a demand... a demand that the world is not as it should be, and that it must be set right..... And act, dear people of God... act according to the love that is in you... because in Love nothing ends in the dark... In Love, it only begins.