

Advent 4, 2012, at Brentwood

The Strength that Brings Peace

**Luke 1:46b-55 & Micah 5:2-5a
(122, 125, 142, 138)**

December 23, 2012

Imagine being in the audience when Micah first spoke.

He's developed a reputation.
You know what to expect, in a way.
Even though he comes from that small town of Moresheth,
comes from humble roots in the country,
his prophetic message is articulate and compelling.
He's been around long enough
to really see and sense the religious and political corruption
that has emerged among the people of Israel
between 750BC and 687BC,
when Assyria has been on the rise
and Judah, the southern kingdom in those times,
is being reduced to an occupied state.

Here's just a bit of what you would have heard from his lips:

⁹ *Listen to me, you rulers of Israel, you that hate justice and turn right into wrong.*

¹⁰ *You are building God's city, Jerusalem, on a foundation of murder and injustice.*

¹¹ *The city's rulers govern for bribes, the priests interpret the Law for pay,
the prophets give their revelations for money—
and they all claim that the Lord is with them.*

"No harm will come to us," they say.

"The Lord is with us."

¹² *And so, because of you,
Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a pile of ruins,
and the Temple hill will become a forest.*

(Micah 3:9-12)

If you had been benefiting from the complex system of corruption
that had emerged among the political, religious, and commercial leaders,
you might just walk out at this point in disgust,
dismissing this prophet as a raving lunatic,
another left-wing kook who should really be repressed.

You would trust the comforting words of your leaders –
“No harm will come to us,” they say.
“The Lord is with us.”

The kind of nightmare this prophetic wing-nut is spouting
is simply wrong.
It couldn't possibly happen.

Yet it did and it still does.

Micah's core message is this:
human flourishing happens
when we are in right relationship with God, others, and ourselves.
It's Jesus' summary of the law and the prophets.
If those relationships are distorted by greed for money and control,
dire consequences will follow.
This kind of corruption in a community will lead to its collapse.

So, that's the critical, challenging, and confrontational
part of the Micah's message,
or rather, of God's message through Micah.

The comforting and encouraging part of the message
is in the passage Winston read for us this morning,
the passage upon which we have been reflecting this past week.

God promises to reassert his authority.
God promises not to abandon his original covenant with Israel,
not to give up on them.
His love for his people is unconditional and everlasting.
Whatever they do,
whatever dire consequences they generate by their corruption,
he will forgive and restore,
reminding them yet again of the nature of his divine love.

It is a quality of love that transcends
anything imaginable on earth.

It is a quality of love that transcends
anything we have experienced in this life.

It is a quality of love that transcends
the way things are in order to generate the way God wants things to be.

And he will do it in his own unique way.
He will reconcile all his beloved creatures to himself

by taking flesh and dwelling among them,
by coming to them as a humble babe
born into a working class family in a cattle stall
in the smallest of towns.

His greatness will not be based in conflict and conquest.
His greatness will not be founded on conceit and corruption.

No, his strength is in the peace
that comes through his transcendent love –
steadfast, constant, unconditional, unimaginable love –
unimaginable, that is, until we see it in the flesh
and feel it in our souls
through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

To be enveloped and embraced by that kind of peace
is the first and foremost gift from God to humanity.
We see it most clearly in the events of that first Christmas –
ordinary people overwhelmed by the transcendent love of God
bringing them together in strange ways
to experience a peace so strong that it cannot be destroyed.
Distorted at times, distant at times, disconcerting at times,
but never destroyed.

This is the strong peace we need to rediscover this Christmas.

The darkness seems pervasive and overwhelming –
mass killings, wars of and on terrorism, corruption throughout our society,
pain and anguish in our families, fears for the future.

But deep within that pain and panic,
deeper than any of the anxieties that lead us away from our true dignity,
lies the steadfast, everlasting love of God for us
that has already reconciled and restored us in Jesus Christ.

That deserves, above anything else in this world,
to be acknowledged, to be celebrated, and to be practiced.

This Christmas, let's renew our determination to do just that.

*May these thoughts and urgings be used by the Holy Spirit
to form us all for witnessing to the mission of Jesus Christ.*

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