

Sermon: Back to the Future
Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
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There is so much demand for our attention these days:

If it's not the kids (or the parents)
then it's the ring, the buzz, the ping of the phone,
if not the phone then it's the to do list and all the necessities of
the coming holiday,
if not the holiday then it's what the house needs or the church
needs or this worthy cause needs or that other one;

And then how can our attention not be drawn to some extent onto the latest and craziest moment in the news, a president impeached, a congress divided, this violent attack, that terrible injustice, concerns about what might be coming with the economy or trying to figure out what's up with the Patriots!

And the roles, all the roles we try to faithfully play; the parental role and the spousal role and the work role and the community member role and the responsible citizen role. We can excel in some of our roles but at times we leave a lot to be desired in other roles and always in every role we could be better, we could always be better.

There is so much demand for our attention.

The season of Advent asks for our attention too, as we heard from Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew. However it's attention of a different order that is asked of us, not an added burden to the anxious-ridden here and now but an invitation to glance towards the future, a promised future:

of less stress and greater peace,
of less striving and more being
of less noise and more quietness,
of less rancor and more love,
a future of...
of less pridefulness and more humility.
of less taking and more giving
of fewer walls and more bridges
of fewer lies and more truth.

We are often told in our modern day climate of supplying and demanding, of producing and consuming, that the path of mental health and spiritual growth and psychological well-being is by way of mindfulness, of being present to the moment, relinquishing the hooks of the past and the lures and concerns of the future. And for certain there is value to that.

But the season of Advent that our Christian tradition frames for us based upon our rootedness in the Jewish revelation of God and the Jewish Messiah therein, charts something of a different course for our spiritual path. It says that what the present moment needs is a taste, a foreshadowing of the future moment to come;

not to rescue us from the present
nor to give us a way to avoid it or deny it
or to escape from the present moment,

For when the present moment is hard, painful, tedious, scary the temptation towards escape from it is great. But the taste of the future moment as named by Isaiah and sung by the psalmist and screamed in the wilderness by John the Baptist is a taste, a reminder of

the coming fulfillment of all things,
the righting of wrongs,
the resolving of discord,
the victory of truth,
the healing of our damaged planet,
the vindication of the abused and oppressed

There is something beautiful about hoping towards that future of which we dream and of which our faith paints beautiful pictures and allowing that hope to circle back on oneself

to calm the nerves of the present,
to settle our sense of responsibility for saving the world,
to relax us into watching, waiting, trusting for God's hand
to move.

If there is a silent and holy night to come, a time when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, when the Christ, the Prince of Peace, will usher in a new day to bless us and all the world, then how does that call us to live now? Rather than cleaning our hands of it all or abdicating all responsibility, might that vision encourage and inspire us to participate in it's arrival, here and now.

That is the idea. Isaiah's pointing toward the future and Christ's resurrection promise of a new heaven and a new earth, are a gift wrapped vision of where it's all going – not to hell in a hand basket, no, no, but to heaven in an abundant cornucopia basket! Ideally it's a vision that elicits from us relief (thank God!) and gratitude (Thank you God) and a sense of HOPE, which inspires us to do what we can now to contribute to that beautiful future's becoming.

Anne Lamotte in her book "Stitches" speaks of hope in this way – "every time we choose the good action or response, the decent, the valuable, it builds incrementally towards renewal, resurrection, a place of newness, freedom, justice. That's the equation," She says "life, death, resurrection, hope. The horror is real so you make your casserole,

organize a food drive, do the laundry for your family.” You just do what you can.

And then she tells this little parable...

“A sparrow was lying in the street with its legs straight up in the air. A warhorse walks up and asks the bird “What on earth are you doing?” “I heard the sky was falling and I wanted to help.” She replies. The horse laughs a big loud sneering horse-laugh and says “you really think you’re going to hold back the sky with those scrawny little legs?” The sparrow replies “one does what one can.”

That’s hope, that’s Advent, that’s allowing the future to inspire the present; doing what you can while trusting God to do the rest.