

ADVENT 2

December 10, 2017 (Saint Peter)

Pastor David P. Nelson

“Comfort, comfort my people, says the Lord”

Grace and peace be unto you from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I missed you last Sunday and prayed for you while at First Lutheran Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. We were visiting my oldest son Timothy, his wife Jen and the incomparable grandsons Lucas and Jackson. It was a hoot. I learned so much. I learned that salmon is called pink fish in that house. I learned that Jackson thinks dinosaur bacon is the best bacon of all. I learned what magna tiles were and what minions were and that the Maxey Elementary school team nickname is the Mustangs. I ate a school lunch in an elementary school cafeteria and the quality of cuisine was exactly as I remember. I learned that my grandkids love me but they think I'm old. I learned rolling around on the floor with a 2 year old and a 5 year old is a joy beyond words and that the next morning most every part of my body hurts.

Watching my son in his new house with his wife and young family made me hopeful. I could see what was ahead for them. I could see the joy and promise

that was in their future even as I knew it would come with some discomfort and disappointment. I could see their lives being wonderful and purposeful and filled with accomplishment even as I could see there would be brokenness and sadness and loss for them as well.

I couldn't help but remember when Timothy came into my life. He came first as a promise. Rev. Nelson, you are going to be a father. 9 months later he would be born at Sinai Hospital on the West Side of Detroit but just the promise of his birth changed me immediately and forever. I became a father before he was born. I was what I waited for. My behavior changed, my planning changed, the rooms in my house changed, my budget changed, my heartbeat changed, and my spirit changed. Months before Timothy was born.....the promise of his coming changed me. I became what I was waiting for.

It is like that for those who wait on the Lord. It is like us in this holy advent season of waiting. You have heard it said that you are what you eat or you are buy or you are what you own or you are what you do but I have learned again that as much as anything, we who believe in Jesus are what we wait for. Our lives change by a promise and that holy promise....that holy coming of the Lord....invites us to become who we wait for.

The prophet Isaiah captures this in the poetry of prophecy. John the Baptist captures this crying in the wilderness and echoing the words of Isaiah. What does hope sound like? What do we wait for?

“Comfort, comfort, O my people. In the desert prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every Valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made low. The rough ground shall

become level, the rugged places a plain. The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

We are what we wait for. We are a people comforted by a God whose love for us is unshakeable and unbreakable. We are a people who wait in hope for the world to be transformed in ways beyond our imagination.....mountains laid low and valleys exalted. Rough places smoothed and uneven ground leveled. The glory of the Lord revealed everywhere. We are what we wait for and what we wait for is no pie in the sky fairy tale. We are what we wait for and our waiting moves us to action...NOW.

Remember who the people of Israel were when Isaiah spoke these words. A people in captivity. A people knocked down and bound.....a people with their future stolen and their present broken. A people with no one to blame but themselves and their relentless unfaithfulness. A people bearing the consequences of their actions in a world gone to hell in a handbasket. No faith in today, barely a memory of yesterday and tomorrows gone the way of broken dreams. And into this the people of Israel are called to be what they wait for. Comfort, comfort O my people. I am coming says the Lord. And I will heal this world.

And into our world.....seemingly so far gone astray. So broken and so profoundly backwards. Where so often the strong trample the weak, the loud drown the voices of the meek, the children's bread is taken and the well-being of those most fragile is forgotten. Into our world where peace is threatened daily and the fundamental dignity of human life is so grossly denied. Into this world, we too are what we wait for. We are God's people whose love for us is unshakeable and unbreakable and who is surely coming.

We are what we hope for.....we are people of that promised coming and because of that promise we change now. We meet hatred with love. We meet disregard with justice. We meet selfishness and self-centeredness with generosity and grace. We meet intolerance with open hearts and we meet despair with hope. We are what we wait for.....and it changes us today. When we become what we wait for we are moved to the paths of peace and the journeys of justice. When we become what we wait for we look more like love and sound more like forgiveness. When we become what we wait for we bear an increasing resemblance to Jesus with an increasing fidelity to the coming Kingdom of God.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer said that Advent is like being in prison: all the good news comes from the outside. And so it is for a people who are what we wait for. The bad news is that we do not have within us what we need the most. The good news is that Jesus does and he is coming. Jesus is what we need and we belong to the One we wait for.

And so we are not what we buy. We are not self-made men and women. We are not living for ourselves and we are not what makes us feel good. We are not orphaned or left alone or without hope in a world gone crazy. We are what we wait for. We are the Lord's and the Lord is on the way to us. Every valley we know will be exalted. All the mountains and hills we see will be made low. The rough places smoothed and the leveled. The glory of the Lord is what we wait for. And that is who we are.