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Sermon Notes: "Anticipation is Making Me Late"
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Sometimes, it's a bit difficult to separate the political from the spiritual. We live in a nation state that claims clear guidelines between church and state, yet, the recent mid-term election showed how that is not always such a clear dividing line.

It makes sense that this would be a difficult division to effect. We're not like light switches: turn off the politics; turn on the religion – we don't work like that. There is a *complexity* to us that is beyond what we know. I think of it as the +1 I've spoken about; the more that it always there; the I Am of God's presence. Or, simply the, "We're not God" recognition.

But these are not the when of old. The prophets were often right in the mix of the political action, much of which was seen by them as the methods God used to inspire, teach, and punish the faithful and less than faithful in the prophet's eyes.

Isaiah takes us right into the mix. It's a time before the birth of Jesus and the Gospels. "Wars and rumors of wars" were the steady events of history for hundreds of years, played out in slow, excruciatingly protracted scenarios – over land and sea on foot and sail and oars. No drones, no satellites, no instant communication by social networks. Hardship and bloodshed few of us know.

These folk had it pretty tough. I don't know if most of them, except those in moments of fleeting power, ever really got much of a break. And they really wanted one. They wanted peace, desperately, and they saw it connected with nations: Judah and Jerusalem and God.

We read Isaiah this morning from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) of the Bible. He wasn't the only one calling for peace.

The Prophet Micah, Micah of Moresheth in Southern Judah prophesied during the early 700's BCE. Isaiah started his ministry sometime later than that also in Judah. Whether one borrowed from the other or they both borrowed from a third source, their prophesies and influence carried the same message: the message of peace.

Isaiah 2: 1-5 Climb God's Mountain

The Message Isaiah got regarding
Judah and Jerusalem: There's a day
coming when the mountain of God's
House
Will be The Mountain—
solid, towering over all mountains.
All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.
They'll say, "Come,
let's climb God's Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.
God'll show us the way God works
so we can live the way we're made."
Zion's the source of the revelation.
God's Message comes from
Jerusalem.
God'll settle things fairly between
nations.
God will make things right between
many peoples.
They'll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.
No more will nation fight nation;
they won't play war anymore.
Come, family of Jacob,
let's live in the light of God.

Micah 4: 1-4: The Making of God's People

But when all is said and done,
God's Temple on the mountain,
Firmly fixed, will dominate all
mountains,
towering above surrounding hills.
People will stream to it
and many nations set out for it,
Saying, "Come, let's climb God's
mountain.
Let's go to the Temple of Jacob's God.
God will teach us how to live.
We'll know how to live God's way."
True teaching will issue from Zion,
God's revelation from Jerusalem.
God will establish justice in the rabble
of nations
and settle disputes in faraway places.
They'll trade in their swords for shovels,
their spears for rakes and hoes.
Nations will quit fighting each other,
quit learning how to kill one another.
**Each person will sit under their own
shade tree,
each person in safety will tend her
own garden.**
God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so,
and God means what God says.

From The Message; adapted for inclusive language

Peace, so we can live the way we're made.

Peace, where each person will sit under their own shade tree, tend to their own garden.

Peace, where things will be so right that nations will turn their swords of fighting into instruments of farming. This was not figurative speech, but a literal expectation and an easy technological process of the time.

Do we long for peace?

If we do, and we do, these words have strike the chord of our desires, even today.

We imagine, hope, pray...

And, the people that listened to the prophets lived in anticipation of such a time when God's direct intervention would center peace in Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be God's Mountain, God's Temple.

And other nations would stream toward it like rivers.

And it would be at the end of battles, and politics, and a final victory at God's hands.

And it had a center. It's hard to separate the nationalism.

And, it's hard to deny that the anticipation for such a change was making everyone late -

too late in seeing where they were and, perhaps, other avenues to take.

They had no Advent, as yet.

Lao Tzu, the Chinese Philosopher, commonly referred to as the Father of Taoism, put it this way:

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

There is a price to pay for peace, in that everyone not only needs to give up their wars, but their reasons for warring.

It is the reason there is not world peace today.

For the ancients, the world, the nations, the cities, the neighbors, homes, and even the hearts were always at war, literally and metaphorically. It was political, social, cultural, religious, and the people most affected – unlike us, had little influence on the outcome other than to call on God, fight, and wait for God to intervene.

It didn't work very well. Why? I'm not sure, but it may be because they saw God outside of who they were, in many ways.

It was a pre-Advent time.

They didn't know what we know now, that there would be the birth of a child in about 4BCE, some seven centuries later, that would produce the greatest change humankind had yet to see,

and a peace we are still waiting to see.

A change to be based on the God within...not the God "out there." It may be that's what makes this so difficult.

And the bridge from the geopolitical turmoil of pre-Advent time to the Advent time is clear in Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6, in which Matthew repeats the prophet's words:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah
And by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
For from you shall come a ruler
Who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

It was what would later send Herod on his rampage of infanticide trying to kill the newborn king he believed would replace him, for neither did he understand.

Isaiah and Micah's time or when, was the prequel to Advent; and now?

Are we in Advent? The sequel? Or just into shopping?

Again we will repeat the story, as a world, for the two thousandth time. And we still haven't gotten it right, either. Yet, world peace seems to take time, regardless of how much we want it now!

Maybe we shouldn't be so harsh on these pre-Advent folk. Maybe this is a much longer journey than any of us understand and with each passing day and markers like Advent along the way – we move closer to the shade tree and the garden. So, how do we fit into all this?

I've been taking a course of study that began with a discussion on the apocalypse and the end-time of things. I couldn't figure out why we kept playing this "when the end would come" over and over again. It became clear that the anticipation and expectation for such things has been in vogue since the birth of civilization as we know it – from the Enuma Elish, to prophets, to Nostradamus, and now to the predicted end of the world with the end of the known Mayan Calendar in 2012. What is the obsession with all this? What are we expecting? Why each time the end "doesn't come" do we pick up and readjust time looking to another future date?

And if we are waiting for our expectations of such things...what are we missing now? How late is all this anticipation making us?

I really do appreciate tradition, remembrances, ceremony – but it sometimes seems as though we look at Advent as a new time, like a new year. In fact, today is the beginning of the new church calendar, referred to as Year A in our lectionary. There are three years in our lectionary, A, B, C. And today begins Year A. I know...

Still, maybe there is another message to Advent that has meanings for those of us who trust in Jesus, as well as those who don't but follow other traditions. Maybe there is a message in reliving these times in the blurred narratives that can touch the hearts of all peoples – even those who have never seen a Christmas tree. For me, for you, maybe, it is the Spirit that just keeps us going. The Spirit within that is the partner to trust – hope.

Maybe part of the message is that:

Expectations of our making are of little value. Such anticipation removes us from the moment and the presence of God. And, waiting for the end is to have already ended. Waiting for the end is to have set aside trust. For us Jesus, for others other powers; still waiting for the end is not actively waiting.

Matthew brings this home for me this morning. He starts out by addressing the followers who trusted in Jesus to quit waiting for the end-time or even the second coming. Listen to what he says:

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only God." Not even Jesus knew.

The message that connects from Isaiah and Micah to Matthew and Jesus and this beginning of remembering the birth of Jesus is two fold:

- 1) To be a believer is to faithfully endure the tribulation (the times) which is part of the church's mission. Not to escape it.
- 2) Disciples, we, are to be busy with the assigned mission, not with apocalyptic speculation.

The question then becomes, when we recognize that we have no power over the cosmos, history, let alone one another, and when we come to the point of seeing God's role in our daily lives in all sorts of ways, what then do we "turn ourselves over to," so to speak. What becomes our mission.

More on that question next week, as we explore Advent and seek to better understand our mission. So, I ask: What, in the name of God, is your mission: not your expectations – but your mission?