Isaiah 2:1-5
December 2, ‘18
Advent 1

“SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS”


TODAY – THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR – IS THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

NOTE THAT.


I KNOW – THERE CAN BE A DANGER IN GETTING TOO CAUGHT UP IN THE TERMINOLOGY WE OFFICIALLY USE WITHIN THE CHURCH.

I AGREE WITH THAT SENTIMENT.

BUT I THINK THERE CAN ALSO BE A DANGER IN GETTING TOO CAUGHT UP IN OUR CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS.

WE NEED ADVENT.

WE NEED A TIME TO PAUSE BEFORE SOMETHING BIG TAKES PLACE.

WE NEED A TIME TO PREPARE.

WE NEED A TIME TO REFLECT.

THAT’S REALLY WHAT ADVENT IS ALL ABOUT.

IT’S A TIME FOR US TO THINK – NOT ONLY ABOUT THE COMING OF CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS, BUT ALSO A TIME TO THINK ABOUT HIS COMING A SECOND TIME.

CHRIST ENTERED OUR WORLD AS AN INFANT.

HE GREW TO BE A MAN.
HE PROCLAIMED THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHEREVER HE WENT.
HE PERFORMED MIGHTY DEEDS & MIRACLES THROUGHOUT THE LAND OF ISRAEL.
HE SUFFERED & DIED ON A CROSS.
HE WAS RAISED FROM DEATH & CONTINUED TO PREACH & TEACH FOR ANOTHER 40 DAYS UNTIL HE DEPARTED.
BUT HE PROMISED HE’D RETURN AGAIN.
THAT’S WHAT WE CONTEMPLATE DURING ADVENT.
WE WAIT & WE PREPARE TO CELEBRATE HIS SECOND COMING AS MUCH AS WE WAIT & PREPARE TO CELEBRATE HIS BIRTH AT CHRISTMAS.
AS WE READ THESE WORDS FROM ISAIAH, THEY ARE WORDS THAT HELP US IN OUR WAITING & IN OUR PREPARATION.
IT’S INTERESTING THAT IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF ISAIAH, THE PROPHET SPOKE HARSH WORDS OF CONDEMNATION & JUDGMENT UPON THE PEOPLE.
BUT HERE – AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE SECOND CHAPTER, HE SPEAKS WORDS THAT ARE FILLED WITH HOPE – HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD, HOPE FOR THINGS THAT ARE YET TO BE.
THAT’S WHY WE PREPARE.
THAT’S WHY WE WAIT.
DR. SEUSS TALKS ABOUT WAITING IN “OH, THE PLACES YOU’LL GO!”
HE SAYS, “THE WAITING PLACE…FOR PEOPLE JUST WAITING WAITING FOR A TRAIN TO GO OR A BUS TO COME, OR A PLANE TO GO OR THE MAIL TO COME,
OR THE RAIN TO GO
OR THE PHONE TO RING, OR THE SNOW TO SNOW
OR WAITING AROUND FOR A YES OR NO.”
IN ADVENT, WE WAIT.
BUT AS WE READ THESE WORDS, THEY SOUND TOTALLY ABSURD.
THEY MAKE NO SENSE AT ALL – UNLESS WE PASS THEM OFF AS PIE-IN-THE-SKY POLLYANNA PROMISES THAT WILL NEVER TURN INTO REALITY.
THE CLOSING WORDS OF THIS PASSAGE ARE WORDS THAT WE READ ELSEWHERE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.
WE FIND THEM IN MICAH.
“They shall beat their swords into plowshares & their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”
MICAH & ISAIAH WERE CONTEMPORARIES, BOTH OF THEM PROPHETS IN THE 8TH CENTURY B.C. – BOTH CONCERNED WITH ISSUES OF JUSTICE & INTEGRITY BEFORE GOD IN A TIME OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY & HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP.
THESE VERY SAME WORDS ARE FOUND ON THE WALL ACROSS FROM THE UNITED NATIONS BUILDING & IF WE THINK OF THEM AS ABSURD WHEN WE HEAR THEM IN WORSHIP, HOW MUCH MORE ABSURD ARE THEY THERE!? 
BUT HERE’S THE THING – JUST BECAUSE THOSE WORDS SOUND ABSURD IN THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE – JUST BECAUSE THOSE WORDS HAVE BEEN ABSURD SINCE ISAIAH & MICAH FIRST PROCLAIMED THEM MORE THAN 2,800 YEARS AGO – JUST BECAUSE THOSE WORDS HAVE SOUNDED ABSURD IN EVERY PERIOD OF TIME
SINCE THEN – DOESN’T MEAN WE DON’T HOPE, WAIT & PREPARE FOR THEM TO BECOME REALITY.

AND, EVEN MORE, IT DOESN’T MEAN THAT, IN OUR OWN LIVES, WE DON’T DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO MAKE THEM COME ABOUT.

YOU MAY REMEMBER HEARING THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES. WHEN SHE WAS JUST SIX YEARS OLD SHE WAS ONE OF THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN TO INTEGRATE THE NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

THE TENSION WENT ON FOR WEEKS, AND THEN MONTHS, AS EVERY MORNING FEDERAL MARSHALS WOULD ESCORT RUBY THROUGH THE LINES OF ANGRY PARENTS HURLING INSULTS, RACIAL SLURS, AND VIOLENT WORDS.

AND THEN THE SAME EVERY AFTERNOON WHEN SCHOOL LET OUT, UNTIL VIRTUALLY EVERY WHITE FAMILY HAD WITHDRAWN THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE SCHOOL.

SO RUBY WENT TO SCHOOL ALL BY HERSELF FOR THE BETTER PART OF THE TERM.

THE SITUATION CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF ROBERT COLES, A CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST AT HARVARD.

COLES WENT TO NEW ORLEANS, INTERVIEWED AND SPENT TIME WITH RUBY AND HER PARENTS.

HE INTERVIEWED HER TEACHER, AND ASKED HOW SHE THOUGHT RUBY COULD TOLERATE SUCH ONGOING ADVERSITY AND ABUSE.

LISTEN TO EXACTLY WHAT THE TEACHER SAID: “I WAS STANDING IN THE CLASSROOM LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW.
I SAW RUBY COMING DOWN THE STREET WITH THE FEDERAL MARSHALS ON BOTH SIDES OF HER.

THE CROWD WAS THERE SHOUTING AS USUAL.

A WOMAN SPAT AT RUBY, BUT MISSED.

RUBY SMILED AT HER.

A MAN SHOOK HIS FIST AT HER. RUBY SMILED.

AND THEN SHE WALKED UP THE STEPS, AND SHE STOPPED AND TURNED AROUND AND SMILED ONE MORE TIME.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT SHE TOLD ONE OF THOSE MARSHALS? SHE TOLD HIM SHE PRAYS FOR THOSE PEOPLE, THE ONES IN THAT MOB.

SHE PRAYS FOR HIM EVERY NIGHT BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP.”

THAT INTERVIEW PROMPTED COLES TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO RUBY ABOUT HER PRAYERS.

“YES,” RUBY SAID. “I DO PRAY FOR THEM.”

COLES ASKED, “WHY? WHY WOULD YOU PRAY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SO MEAN TO YOU AND SAY SUCH BAD THINGS ABOUT YOU?”

“BECAUSE MAMA SAID I SHOULD.”

COLES PRESSED HER ON THAT.

RUBY SAID, “I GO TO CHURCH. I GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY, AND WE’RE TOLD TO PRAY FOR PEOPLE, EVEN BAD PEOPLE.

MAMA SAYS IT’S TRUE. MY MINISTER SAYS THE SAME THING. ‘WE DON’T HAVE TO WORRY,’ HE SAYS.

HE CAME TO OUR HOUSE, AND HE SAY, ‘GOD IS WATCHING OVER US.’

HE SAID, IF I FORGIVE THE PEOPLE AND SMILE AT THEM AND PRAY FOR THEM, GOD WILL KEEP A GOOD EYE ON EVERYTHING AND HE’LL PROTECT US.”
COLES ASKED IF SHE THOUGHT THE MINISTER WAS RIGHT.

“OH, YES,” RUBY SAID, “I’M SURE GOD KNOWS WHAT IS HAPPENING. GOD’S GOT A LOT TO WORRY ABOUT, BUT THERE’S BAD TROUBLE HERE. GOD CAN’T HELP BUT NOTICE. HE MAY NOT DO ANYTHING RIGHT NOW, BUT THERE WILL COME A DAY.

LIKE THEY SAY IN CHURCH, THERE WILL COME A DAY. YOU CAN COUNT ON IT. THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY IN CHURCH.”

“THERE WILL COME A DAY.”

SOMEDAY THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT.

AS WE LOOK BACK NOW – MORE THAN 50 YEARS LATER – THE WORDS OF RUBY BRIDGES SOUND PROPHETIC IN MANY WAYS.

CLEARLY THINGS AREN’T YET WHAT WE WISH THEY WERE, BUT BECAUSE OF THE HOPE & THE FAITH OF THOSE LIKE RUBY, WE SEE THE VISION OF ISAIAH IN THIS PASSAGE BECOMING REALITY.

WE HOPE, WE PREPARE, WE WAIT – AND WE ACT.

WE DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO ENABLE THOSE VISIONS TO BECOME REALITY.

WE ACT SO THAT “SOMEDAY” BECOMES “NOW.”

THERE’S A SIMILAR STORY TO RUBY’S.

NEARLY A DECADE AFTER HER EXPERIENCE, A YOUNG MAN NAMED RON LEFT THE MARINES AFTER SERVING OUR COUNTRY FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

HE MADE A LIVING DOING ODD JOBS & SELLING REFRIGERATORS.

HE ALSO PLAYED PIANO, WROTE SONGS & MADE A LITTLE EXTRA MONEY PLAYING IN A BAR IN CHICAGO.
ONE NIGHT, WHILE HE WAS PLAYING, A MAN CAME IN & KEPT DROPPING FIVE DOLLARS IN HIS TIP JAR FOR EVERY SONG RON PLAYED.

FINALLY, THE MAN SAID, “I’M STARTING A RECORD COMPANY & I’VE GOT LOTS OF FOLKS WHO COULD SING YOUR SONGS. WHY DON’T YOU COME TO DETROIT & BE ONE OF MY SONGWRITERS?”

HAVING NOTHING HOLDING HIM BACK, THE VERY NEXT MORNING, RON PACKED UP EVERYTHING HE OWNED & MOVED TO DETROIT.

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE SONGS THAT RON WROTE THAT INTRIGUED THAT MAN STARTING A RECORD COMPANY.

SOMEONE WRITING ABOUT HIM YEARS LATER SAID, “RON MILLER REALLY CARED ABOUT PEOPLE. HE WROTE OF PEACE & HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW DURING A TIME OF WAR & THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. BUT HE DIDN’T JUST WRITE ABOUT IT. HE LIVED IT IN EVERYTHING HE DID.”

THAT MAN WHO WAS INTRIGUED BY RON MILLER’S SONGS WAS BERRY GORDY & THAT START-UP RECORD COMPANY WAS MOTOWN.

FOR YEARS, RON MILLER WAS REFERRED TO AS “THE ONLY WHITE GUY AT MOTOWN.”

ONE OF HIS SONGS, WRITTEN FOR YOUNG TEEN-AGED STEVIE WONDER, BECAME ONE OF THE MOST RECORDED SONGS IN HISTORY WITH MORE 270 ARTISTS SINGING “FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE.”

RON MILLER HAD A VISION OF ISAIAH’S “SOMEDAY” & RUBY BRIDGES’ “THERE WILL COME A DAY.”

HE KNEW THAT “SOMEDAY” MIGHT BE IN THE DISTANT FUTURE BUT HE ALSO KNEW THAT IF HE WANTED IT TO COME TO PASS, HE’D HAVE TO DO HIS PART TO SEE THAT IT DID.
HE HAD A HOPE & A VISION FOR WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN

“SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS.”

"Someday At Christmas"

Someday at Christmas men won't be boys
Playing with bombs like kids play with toys
One warm December our hearts will see
A world where men are free

Someday at Christmas there'll be no wars
When we have learned what Christmas is for
When we have found what life's really worth
There'll be peace on earth

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmas time

Someday at Christmas we'll see a land
With no hungry children, no empty hand
One happy morning people will share
Our world where people care

Someday at Christmas there'll be no tears
All men are equal and no men have fears
One shining moment, one prayer away
From our world today

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmas time
Someday at Christmas man will not fail
Hate will be gone and love will prevail
Someday a new world that we can start
With hope in every heart

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmas time
Someday at Christmas time

(Composed by Ron Miller and Ryan Wells and recorded by Stevie Wonder)

“MAYBE NOT IN TIME FOR YOU & ME.”

But with the vision of Isaiah before us, we must always do everything in our power in our own lives & in our own time, to make that vision become reality.

As we enter the Advent season, we always know that we can never separate the cradle from the cross.

We come now to that which reminds us of one who gave his life that the vision of a better & brighter world might be ours.

We come to the table of our Lord to be strengthened to do our part to see the vision of that world come to pass. Amen.

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