

## **November 8, 2020 (Focus: Isaiah 40; Joshua 24; post-election)**

Originally our scripture reading came from Joshua, chapter 24, the end of that book, the book that comes right after the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament or Hebrew Testament. Joshua is the leader of the Israelites as they enter and settle into the Promised land after wandering in the desert for 40 years, the inheritor of the mantle from Moses after his death.

After settling the land, Joshua reminds his people of where they came from, descendants of Abraham who came to that very land many many generations ago, someone who left the old gods behind and made a covenant with a new god, the one true God. Joshua asks his people, what about you? We've had our ups and downs with God, we've not trusted God from time to time and we've turned to other gods. We are a fickle people, so what about us, do we turn back to our God, and do we recovenant with our God. Joshua witnesses to his people: "as for me and mine, we will serve the Lord."

It is an inflection point, to use a phrase mentioned in the President-elect's speech last night, it is a point in the history between God and God's people: what will they choose to do? Will things stay the same, or will they change? Spoiler alert: the people choose to serve the Lord, although as they rest of the Bible shows, there are many more inflection points to come where God's people will have to decide again to turn back to God's ways.

The thing about the book of Joshua that makes it not easy fodder for preaching on a Sunday morning in our time and place is that to give the context of this inflection point is to have to talk about some difficult things. When Joshua and the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered the Promised Land, that land flowing with milk and honey, what is often overlooked is that that land was already occupied. And what happens to those people already there, and the Israelites' justification for their violence against them, is, well, a troubling aspect of the Bible, one that often turns people against God because they cannot reconcile this smiting God with the God of love that they know. We could spend a lot of time discussing this, and I would be glad to do so at some other time and place, but I don't think that is what we need to hear today.

For another image was mentioned in that speech last night, an image that we need today I think. An image that is also about an inflection point, a point at which God's people are reminded by the prophet that their God is a loving and forgiving and gracious God, who will not leave them exiled in a life that seems so

far from where they think they should be if they are beloved by God. They should not feel as if they are locked in a prison of sorts, punished and enduring a sort of torture. Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. You may feel as if God has abandoned you, but remember this: The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary. God has not abandoned you. God is with you. God knows you are tired of the awful rhetoric, of the pitting of one group against the other. God knows you are frustrated and angry that things are done in your name that do not reflect your better ideals. God knows that you feel powerless against forces that lie and steal and separate families and turn their backs on the sick and the poor and the marginalized. God does not faint or grow weary; God gives of God's own power, which is love, to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

Waiting has not been easy this last week, or the last few years, or over the course of our nation's history of racism, or over the course of time when we have had laws that discriminate against people of color, and women, and LGBTQ folk, and immigrants, and the poor. Waiting has not been easy, especially when it has been active waiting, as we have done what we could and yet it seemed our efforts were in vain against powerful forces. Waiting has not been easy. But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength – you feel it don't you? My sister said yesterday that her granddaughter had been feeling sick, but as soon as the waiting was over for the news of the election projections, she suddenly felt much better. People were singing and dancing in the streets.

Now I know that not everyone is elated. Tens of millions are not happy about the results of the election. Tens of millions would have been happy that this is not an inflection point. They would have been happy that things would carry on as they were. That change wasn't needed. But as for me and mine, as for all of us I suspect, we hold in our hearts children separated from their parents at the border, people stuck in limbo between fear of death and a closed border. We hold in our hearts Jacob Blake and the families of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Tony Robinson and so many others shot or killed for being black. We hold in our hearts those try to hold home and family together on less than a living wage. We hold in our hearts those who have lost a loved one to the pandemic or suffering long term effects or suffering depression in isolation. We know that the very planet is crying out for help, wondering how long we will wait before we recognize the path of destruction we are on.

Yes, as for me and mine, as for us, we see all of this with our eyes and our minds and our hearts, and we seek change for the sake of our neighbors and for all creation. We wait for the Lord, but it is an active waiting. And while we wait for and work for the time when all will be comforted and blessed, we know that God is renewing our strength. We know that we can run the race set before us, and yes, we may get tired, but we will not weary of the work that we must do to bring about God's kingdom here on earth. It is our mission, it is our calling, it is why we are church in this place. We are here to walk the walk and talk the talk and do the good we intend.

A week or two ago when we were having those very windy days, I was driving along Monona Drive about at the point where it turns into Atwood Avenue, right where the road is just a block from Lake Monona, and the wind was whipping off the lake. I looked up and saw a bird, probably some sort of hawk, and it at first appeared motionless up in the sky, hovering as if it were calm, but I could tell it was in a sense using the turmoil of the wind, going with it but not being overcome by it, but rather finding a way through the wind to keep on soaring. They shall mount up with wings like eagles...with God's help, we too can soar, even in the wind storm of a pandemic, and racism and xenophobia and heterosexism and misogyny and disregard for the poor and corruption and violence and despair, we too can soar, mounting with wings like eagles, and walk the path of faith set before us, and not be weary. For that is what God intends for us. Comfort, oh comfort my people, for you are beloved, and you are needed.