

Bible Study
Advent 1, Year A
November 27, 2016

[RCL] Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44; Psalm 122

Isaiah 2:1-5

The great vision of Isaiah paints a vivid imagery of what Jerusalem would be: a place of refuge where nations flock and learn the truth. Undoubtedly, the passage is an articulation of Isaiah's hope for peace in the midst of tumultuous times. One day, people would know the sovereignty of God and as a response they would go to Zion the sanctuary of the faith where the absolute trust in God will heal all relationships marred by mutual distrust and fear. According to Isaiah, God will be at the center of the movement towards lasting peace. The instruments of destruction will be the very means of construction, and there the unconquerable conviction of people towards a world free of war and suffering will finally find its fruition.

It is admittedly an idealistic vision, and some who take pride in their realism will surely question it. Yet one of the undisputable responsibilities of Christians is to work for peace. Christians should be part of the solution in resolving conflicts, and the first ones to pursue peace in strained personal or corporate situations. By doing so, we take part in the good work of building the kingdom of God in our present circumstances.

- Is it possible to have peace among nations and individuals without God?
- What current issues in the world today challenge the fragile peace among peoples?
- How have you been an agent for peace in your own community?

Psalm 122

The psalmist begins with the words, "I was glad when they said to me, 'let us go to the house of the Lord.'" The happy tone of the psalm is understandable for the Israelites embark on an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The moment that their "feet are standing within the gates" of the holy land, they feel exuberant and joyful. Such is the love they have for the city that they pronounce peace, unity, solace, and prosperity within its blessed walls.

In our context, the church symbolizes the new Jerusalem; a city acting as light in darkness, inviting all to feel the presence of God in the midst where truth is found and all are assembled for the sole purpose of praising God.

- When hearing an invitation to go to church, do you feel the same anticipation expressed in the psalm?
- Do you always pray the same things as the psalmist did for the church?
- How have you been empowered by your involvement in the church?

Romans 13:11-14

St. Augustine was walking in a garden oblivious of the beauty around him for his heart was in turmoil. He felt miserable for he consistently fails to live the good and moral life he desperately longs for. Then a still child-like voice ushered him to “Take and read.” He grabbed a copy of one of Paul’s writings and his eyes rested upon the words: “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” He did not need to read further. A calm assurance unlike anything he ever felt before unraveled his heart and caused him to believe.

The conversion story of St. Augustine is a good starting point to understand how even a difficult passage which sets a standard of morality can settle in a person. Though there are some people who insist on the verbal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as the basis and finality of conversion, several passages in the bible like this one beg to disagree.

Discipleship is a process of becoming. It is an act of conforming ourselves to be Christ-like through the Holy Spirit. The willful response to the call to be holy is the natural consequence of faith, an expression of love, and the evidence of it. A personal transformation should be seen. So to carry the cross in our daily lives means striving to “lay aside” every deed that is contrary to the character of Christ, and to put on the “armor of light”, that is to put our utmost effort to protect ourselves from being drawn into the false cloak of darkness, thriving in excessive indulgence and all forms of depravity.

- Just as Augustine was inspired to follow Christ after reading this passage in Paul’s letter to the Romans, have you had a similar experience when reading the Scriptures?
- Since being a Christian bids you to gradually become Christ-like everyday, what personal challenges or inner conflicts have you encountered in the process?

Matthew 24:37-44

The act of vigilant waiting for the unexpected manner of Christ’s coming has been re-echoed throughout the New Testament writings. However, this particular passage in Matthew’s gospel is unique in its comparison of the Day of the Lord as similar to the narrative of Noah and the flood.

One can imagine that Jesus’ return would bring shock and desperation among the people like the inhabitants of the earth during the time of Noah, since he built the ark in clear and cloudless days enduring the mockery of his neighbors. Thus, the emphasis of the dominant theme in this particular passage: being vigilant in the faith; to hold fast to the end without wavering.

- Christians live in the present without losing our sense of eternity, how do you stay vigilant in the faith?
- Is vigilance more difficult in our society, which is focused more on individualism and consumerism?

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Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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