

2nd Advent Meditation: Just Peace

by Kat Wagner

In these Advent readings we find ourselves in the middle of strife.

For Isaiah's listeners: a divided kingdom, captives in exile, the looming threat from empires and armies, a forgotten God and a people who had lost their way.

For Mark's listeners, time had passed and empires had fallen, but God's people were now living under occupation of another power, the Romans, with only a thin hope of an eventual Messiah who would liberate them.

IMAGE 1 (window)

War, threat, division, loss of hope. A world we may be able to relate to now.

In Advent, we remember that when the situation is bad and the future looks bleak, God speaks comfort to his people.

IMAGE 2 (lighting a candle)

Dear sisters and brothers, it's Second Advent.

We have lit two candles.

And today we are thinking in doubles.

Today's readings start with two important words:

Comfort, comfort.

The words are spoken twice.

A double consolation.

A message of hope repeated and echoed in the heavens.

Words of comfort are desperately needed by these people. Peace is needed in this world.

A peace that comforts. A peace that liberates. A peace that endures. A peace that is just.

This promise of just peace was in the making.

Salvation was on the way.

Return of exiles from far-off places;

A strong God who would deliver them from their enemies.

IMAGE 3 (Jerusalem street)

Isaiah's message was to the city people of Jerusalem.

But the message of peace was not to be found there in the streets of safety and prosperity.

The voice which says, "Comfort, comfort" is a far off sound in the wilderness.

Beyond them. Outside the city walls.

In the least expected place.

IMAGE 4 (desert)

The words 'Comfort, Comfort' echo in the mountains, and tender whispers are heard in the dust-laden winds.

Out of the place of destitution, desolation and dryness comes the message of peace.

God shows a way to peace. Peace which is deep and true and long-lasting and just.

And here in these passages we have God's secret of peace:

Peace does not come from just exerting might and winning by force.

And peace does not come from just retreating and waiting it out.

A battle-won peace will always leave casualties and trauma.

And a passive peace will always have fears and hate lingering under the surface.

IMAGE 5a+b (lion and shepherd)

But God's peace is both mighty and gentle.

God's peace is both strong and kind.

Our God is a God of might and a God of gentle leading.

A warrior and a shepherd.

Our God has strong arms: strong arms to rule and strong arms to gather up lambs.

In God's peace there is no true victory without care; there is no true power without compassion.

IMAGE 6 (desert b&w)

Many centuries after Isaiah, a voice was heard again in the wilderness, crying out: "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

And the people came.

They left their dust-free houses and ordered society and found a wild man in the desert.

They found John, who prophesied a coming Saviour.

IMAGE 7 (barefoot on sand)

The city people left their comfortable and familiar world and went out into the unknown and uncomfortable desert.

They struggled to find the road, their clothes got dusty.

IMAGE 8 (desert & sky)

But as they walked and the city diminished in size, the horizon opened up, earth and sky expanded into vastness, and the message of peace grew in volume.

IMAGE 9 (two hands in water)

Comfort, comfort.

Mercy, mercy.

Repent, and be baptised.

Receive forgiveness, forgive.

Justice, justice.

Peace, my peace I give you.

IMAGE 10 (lantern)

In Advent, we receive this message of just peace. And we pray: Let us be people of peace: people who are not afraid to take a stand and be strong in the face of injustice, and people who reach out a hand and whisper words of comfort.

In Advent, we remember that when the situation is bad and the future looks bleak, God speaks comfort to his people.

IMAGE 11 (road covered by sand)

And so this Advent, let us prepare the way for God's just peace.

Make a way for this peace.

Get out into the desert places and prepare a way.

Walk the rocky path and smooth it out.

Find the dusty, blurred and broken edges of the track and say, "Here, God will bring peace."

Look out into the vastness of wilderness and announce that, in this place, God is coming with good news.

IMAGE 12 (Jesus holding a lamb)

Because the Saviour is coming.

With strong arms: to rule and to gather up lambs.

Christ is coming and has come and will come again.

Amen

IMAGE 13 (hands holding candle)... remains on screen until after the 'Response to Meditation'