

ADVENT TWO

DECEMBER 8, 2013

AFTER NELSON MANDELA DIED

I wrote a sermon earlier in the week, (or got a good start at one)
and then....

Nelson Mandela died.

And somehow it seemed that I needed to write a new one.

This will not be a sermon about him

but about the things that make for hope and peace

and the way forward toward the birth of God among us once again.

Today we've heard John the Baptizer warn us to turn around and get on the way.

We've lost the way, we've depended on, or blamed our parents, he says, and we need to
grow up and take responsibility for ourselves....

we need to take a good hard look at where our lives are going

and if they're going in a wrong direction

we need to turn around

just turn around

and get on the right road. The one where the tree grows strong

where the fruit of the tree is lush and for the healing of nations

and where the tree is rooted solid in the glory of God and blooms and bears the fruit of
the kingdom

get on THAT road, John says. Just do it.

John , bless his heart – he has absolutely no people skills, but he got the job done – he
focused the discussion and he won't let us off with excuses – any excuses.

So I come to this sermon with the words of John ringing in my ears.

And I WANT to be on that road. I do. With all my heart. I want our world to be the
world that Isaiah describes and the one John calls us to.

Last week we were talking about hope. Let me go back there for a few minutes.

I said

Remember when you were 15 and you had a huge crush on someone
who didn't know you existed?

And what did you do?

You spent a lot – A LOT of time thinking about that person

imagining what it would be like if you were together

and you went out of your way to show up in places where you were likely to run into her
or him.

Right?

And I asked: what if we treated hope like that? What if we treated peace like that? Longed for them, spent lots of time wishing for, praying for, imagining what it would be like and going out of our way to put ourselves in places where they are.

Does that make sense to you?

So what are those places? Where can we hang out, where we're likely to be in the presence of hope and of peace so that we may develop an intimate relationship with them?

You will have your own answers, each of you. As individuals, we have to know ourselves well enough to know what we need, when we're longing for hope and for peace. What do YOU need?

For me, when I am feeling hopeless, and aching for peace I know I need time alone. I need quiet and often I need to sleep. I turn to music, often the old boomer music of my youth, not necessarily overtly religious. Things that call me back to the passion of my youth. I need to read good books; and I need to write.

the concert this weekend by the community choir. They sang Go Tell it On the mountain and it was ...glorious.

Last year Tom Jackson was here. I went to the concert – I remember almost not going – I was tired, it was cold, I had 100 other things to do. I went. He ended it like this: he got us singing silent night

and in the last verse he just walked off the stage.

Just walked off. Left us to finish it ourselves, because that's how it is. We finish it ourselves. We had to listen to one another to keep in time and in tune once he was gone...we had to do it ourselves. It was – just exactly right.

And I need to do hopeful things even when I don't feel hopeful. I need to DO things – write an Amnesty International letter, make a visit to a shut in, have a conversation with someone

Methodists have a theological word for that. Sanctification. My Methodist clergy friend Tracy says that Sanctification, translated, is “fake it 'til you make it” - when you are feeling hopeless, do hopeful deeds and soon, often sooner than you thought, you will feel hope.

That's what I do. What do you do?

And it seems to me that for the world, which seems at times to be hopeless, the world, for all our cynicism and apathy and desire for glitter...

for all that,
the world aches for something real.
For hope
that forgiveness can be real; that love is not a fool's dream
and that we can truly be one family under the star-filled sky.

And so Nelson Mandela dies
and it was as though the world stopped for a day or so
moments of silence in places of power
and tears from even the most jaded of people.
It seems as though something precious is gone from the world
What IS that? What made that happen?
I don't know. Not to take away from Madiba – not at all.
but there are *many* astounding people in the world
why this almost universal reverence for him and not for others?

I don't know, but it gives me hope.
It's like this worn out old world, too grown up for our own good, this planet broken and
tired and sick
turned suddenly into a child on Christmas Eve – all of us on tiptoe, daring to listen for
reindeer hooves; allowing ourselves to believe it might be true.
People CAN have integrity. Peace IS possible and we can love one another across lines
of race and politics and age and whatever else has kept us apart.

This is a scrap of hope. A promise of peace.

I thought again about John and how he talks about the tree: bear fruit he says, or you'll
get chopped down. And the fire will be the fire of God's unimaginable grace – and there
will be new growth – let's be clear about that -
but even he hasn't lost hope that we can and will bear fruit worthy of our Creator

I got this image of a tree, and a bird, making a nest. It struck me that like a bird, we're
looking for what we can find in our world, to make a proper nest to cradle the Christ
child once again. Looking around the world, around our lives, for small bits of hope,
moments of possibility, an open door....

looking to put them together so that they create meaning
so that together, they are stronger than they are apart
and form a pattern and build a nest

Mandela's death, one scrap of hope. Others – some known only to you. Unexpected acts
of kindness, music that would make you weep withfeelings you thought were
buried....whatever scraps of hope you can pick up in your beak.....

weave together
so that there will be a place of hope and peace for Love to be born.

May you seek hope and peace with all your heart
placing yourself on the path where you know it is to be found

may you look for it as you would a lover
nostrils quivering for its aroma, sighing as we imagine what it could be like
on high alert for sightings

and ready to weave