

2019 12 01 – Active Hope

Isaiah 2:1-5

Let's begin today with some of Friday's news headlines....

Brazilian president accused of inciting genocide of Indigenous people

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/brazilian-president-accused-inciting-genocide-1.5377622>

North Korea says it has 'successful test' of super-large multiple launch rocket system <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/north-korea-test-1.5376453>

Suspect shot dead by police at London Bridge after several people stabbed

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/london-bridge-incident-1.5378004>

It's Black Friday — and Canadians are leaving Boxing Day behind

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/black-friday-1.5377842>

'We can't shop our way out of this': Why all those Black Friday deals are costly for the environment. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-nov-29-2019-1.5378009/we-can-t-shop-our-way-out-of-this-why-all-those-black-friday-deals-are-costly-for-the-environment-1.5378014>

'We've gone backward': Families say urgent psychiatric care not a priority in Sask. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/urgent-psychiatric-care-not-a-priority-1.5376498>

Every one of these headlines has an underlying story. Every one of these stories highlights an important and troubling issue that exists in our world: violence, war, climate change, consumerism, and a lack of support for marginalized people.

And this is just a small portion of one day's news items on the CBC website.

It turns out that 2500 years ago things weren't all that different. Our scripture reading today is from the second chapter of the book of Isaiah. But if we go back to the previous chapter, the first chapter, we find the context for today's reading. In this first chapter, the prophet shares the following message from God, from YHWH, Isaiah says:

Oh, what a sinful nation you are!
A people weighed down with injustice!
You're a gang of thugs, corrupt children
who abandoned and despised me –
YHWH, the Holy One of Israel –
and turned your backs on me! (Isaiah 1:4)

Your rulers are now rebels,
consorting with thieves.
All are greedy for profit
and chase after bribes.
They deny justice to orphans
and cause the widowed to go begging. (Isaiah 1:25)

Isaiah is speaking to the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob and his wives, Leah and Rachel. Isaiah is speaking to them in a troubled time, a time when their land, the land of Judah, is being besieged by neighbouring countries. Isaiah is saying to his people that many of their troubles are caused by their own unjust and sinful ways and he is asking them to change. Isaiah is pleading with his people to do something to fix the world in which they live. He quotes their God, saying:

“Come now! Let's look at the choices before you,” says YHWH.
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they can be as white as snow.
Though they are red as crimson,
they can be like fleece.
If you are willing to obey,
you will eat the best that the land has to offer –
but if you persist in rebellion
the sword will consume you instead!”
The mouth of YHWH has spoken. (Isaiah 1:18-20)

When we read the daily headlines, when we listen to the warnings of the prophets, it can sometimes feel overwhelming. When things are this bad, what can we do? When violence and hate, and greed seem to be running rampant in the world what can one person, one small group or even one church community possibly do? It's easy to feel helpless and hopeless.

But the good news is that prophets also come with a vision. They also come with a dream of what the world could be. They come with a prophecy of new life. Stacie read the prophet Isaiah's vision for us today. Isaiah is able to see a world where God's laws of peace and justice will reign supreme. Isaiah is able to see a world where:

[The people] will beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
One nation will not raise the sword against another,
And never again will they train for war. (Isaiah 2:4b)

If we are going to make a difference in our world, the first thing we need is a prophet with a vision, with a dream. So let's name some of today's prophets. Who is out there in the world today, or has been among us in the last century, giving us a vision of what the world could be? Whose vision speaks to you? Who is your prophet? (*wait for answers: Greta Thunberg, David Suzuki, Thich Nat Hanh, The Dalai Lama, The Pope, Joanna Macy, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela*) Yes, there are many people who inspire us with their vision, people who help us see the possibility of a new tomorrow, prophets who give us hope.

But, once we have that vision – that dream, that hope – what do we do with it? I mean, it can still feel overwhelming to try to tackle all the problems of the world. But, for me, that’s where faith comes in. If I thought that I had to tackle all these problems on my own, I wouldn’t even try. But our faith tells us that we are not alone. God is with us and we are surrounded by a community, a worldwide community of people who care. I want to share a story that I found on the Internet, a story that comes from the other side of our planet:

A samurai who was known for his nobility and honesty, went to visit a monk to ask him for his advice.

When the monk had finished his prayers, the Samurai asked, “Why do I feel so inferior? I have faced death many times, have defended those who are weak. Nevertheless, upon seeing you meditating, I felt that my life had absolutely no importance whatsoever.”

“Wait. Once I have attended to all those who come to see me today, I shall answer you.” – replied the monk.

The samurai spent the whole day sitting in the temple gardens, watching the people go in and out in search of advice. He saw how the monk received them all with the same patience and the same illuminated smile on his face.

At nightfall, when everyone had gone, the samurai demanded: “Now can you teach me?”

The master invited him in and led him to his room. The full moon shone in the sky, and the atmosphere was one of profound tranquility.

“Do you see the moon, how beautiful it is? It will cross the entire firmament, and tomorrow the sun will shine once again. But sunlight is much brighter, and can show the details of the landscape around us: trees, mountains, clouds. I have contemplated the two for years, and have never heard the moon say: why do I not shine like the sun? Is it because I am inferior?”

“Of course not.” – answered the samurai. “The moon and the sun are different things; each has its own beauty. You cannot compare the two.”

“So you know the answer. We are two different people, each fighting in his own way for that which he believes, and making it possible to make the world a better place; the rest are mere appearances.”

<https://alltimeshortstories.com/shine-your-own-way/>

So even when we feel overwhelmed by the news of the day, it is possible for us to have hope, an active hope, a hope that moves us to make changes in ourselves and in our world, because we know that we are not alone. We know that YHWH, God, the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being is supporting us and that we are connected to all the other people in this world who have a similar vision.

It is possible for us to have hope, an active hope, a hope that moves us to make changes in ourselves and in our world, because we know that we don't have to do it all. We know that we just have to use the talents that we have been given. We know that we just have to follow the sacred light that is found within each one of us.

So with the house of Leah and Rachel and Jacob let us follow Isaiah's invitation:
"come, let us walk in the light of YHWH!"