

“At Peace”  
Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15a  
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“Strive to be found by him at peace,”  
says the writer of today’s lection from Second Peter.  
Peace meaning lack of concern or stress  
about when the world will be made right by Christ’s return.  
Jesus’ return seems a distant hope for us today,  
but for the author’s community it was pressing.  
He or she was writing to churches  
some 50 to a hundred years after Jesus death.<sup>i</sup>  
Either way a quick return is already out of the question.

Second Peter does not show up often in the lectionary,  
but Advent is an obvious time of year for it to be heard.  
Using the name of Peter, an elder is writing  
to Christians scattered through five provinces  
at the edge of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor.  
We can tell from the text that Jesus’ followers  
are called by the name “Christian” at this point  
and are subject to social isolation and various kinds of abuse.  
The author is writing to encourage them, calling them  
to have confidence in the power of God,  
to find meaning in their suffering, and renew their hope.

It would probably be wise of us to admit that, at least in some important ways,  
we have no idea what their lives were like.  
For the most part our being Christian  
does not limit where we can get a job,  
who we can be friends with,  
our safety when we walk down the street,  
or whom we might wish to marry.  
The situation of those hearing this letter in the writer’s day  
was closer to what it’s like to being a Muslim  
in a small US town or city,  
where being yelled at on the street on a once a month is common,  
refused work or housing, or worrying for your safety  
or that of loved ones is the common experience.

On top of that, Christians are being scoffed at,  
perhaps by former Christians, for ever having hoped  
that Jesus was coming back soon.

There is no divine roll in human life, say the scoffers,  
never has been, never will be.

The topic still sells best sellers today.  
In the midst of scoffing and abuse, the writer offers reasons,  
three of them, why fellow disciples can find peace,  
even in the midst of far less than peaceful circumstances.  
The first is that God's time is different from our time,  
vastly different, and the delay creates space  
for more and more people to turn to Christ  
and find the hope and peace of salvation.  
Remember: the word salvation means wholeness and well-being  
as well as rescue or deliverance from danger.  
That God's time is not like ours  
may not be comforting for people who are marginalized and hurting *now*,  
but the writer insists that what he calls God's patience  
is a form of divine grace.

Second, the Day of Lord, when it *does* come,  
will be sudden, like a thief in the night,  
and will transform and reveal, or disclose, everything.

For those who enjoy studying scholarly arguments,  
there is a doozy of an argument about the meaning  
of the Greek word we read as "disclosed."

You can look the issue up online if you like  
a spend a couple of delightful hours.

An alternative to disclosed is "burned up," implying  
refined the way metal is purified and refined.

But I was happy to learn this week that the majority  
of folks who spend their lives  
bent over scrolls and scrapes of parchment  
have come down on the side of "disclosed."<sup>ii</sup>  
There will be an openness to the kingdom of God  
unlike anything we have ever experienced.

Think about it. What would *you* would like to see disclosed  
so that everyone saw and agreed on what they saw all at once.

My personal list includes 1) the outing of abusers of every stripe  
who have never owned up to the lives they've shattered;  
2) what really happened in the 2016 election;  
3) truths about the public health disaster  
caused by the US obsession with guns;  
and 4) the economic and political value brought to the US  
by immigrants and refugees though the years.

Okay, that's my list. You can imagine your list, too.

It's not that there is not information available about all these things,  
but we live in a time of *my* facts and her facts,  
your truth and my truth,  
and exchanging information, no matter how credible the source,

no longer has much impact.  
Am I right in thinking most of us, no matter our politics,  
would welcome a day of disclosure  
that no one, not even we, could dispute?

The third and final argument is the one that probably applies the most to us.  
Since God's time is *not* our time,  
and the revelation of things *will* be swift when it does come,  
we do not need to spend a single moment worrying about or longing for it.  
It will be when it will be.

What we *can* do is be here now, living confidently in God,  
working for the things we *can* see and care about  
not allowing politics or apathy or, worse, mindless entertainments  
to seduce us into meaninglessness.

The herald whose voice sounds in Isaiah's prophecy agrees.  
Far from being a time for fear, says this announcement,  
we are at a welcome turning point.

"From now on I will treat you kindly, gently  
as a shepherd leads sheep with new born lambs," says God.

"Be comforted because, even though you are right  
about the frailty of your own life, and the frailty of the world,  
I am not fragile, I will not fade,  
or weaken or end or die.

I am for you and I will endure,  
and now it is time to rest and rely on me."

"Prepare the way of the Lord," says the voice,  
meaning trust and be prepared for what *God* will do without fail.  
The preparation is about the maze of inequalities in the world;  
which need to be leveled out  
with the high being brought low and the low being lifted up  
and God will accomplish it.

In order for everyone to see God in all God's glory,  
the valleys in the wilderness where people are weeping  
because things have been taken from them  
or never given to them in the first place have to be  
lifted up into the light. They have to be disclosed.

The mountains where people who have everything have always lived  
in fortresses, those have to be brought down to the plain too,  
where the fences aren't needed any more.

Everybody is trapped the high and the low,  
and when God comes, says the prophet,  
No one will be trapped in those ways anymore.

It's extraordinarily beautiful, but if you like your mountaintop it's  
a little frightening too.

Robert's Father, Tucker, married again after Rob's mother died.  
Rizz as she was called, was Rosamond Arthur,  
the widow of a Wall Street stock broker.  
She owned a stunning home on Long Island Sound.  
and big chunk of beachfront on the Sound.  
The house was on a promontory that overlooked the water  
and the driveway to the house was long and winding.  
Curve after curve wound up the wooded hillside,  
and I realized that the approach had been designed that way on purpose,  
to give one a sense of separateness and distance,  
and yes even of being above the reach of others.  
The very rich like winding roads and even rutted driveways  
that dissuade the curious.

That paths in the valley *and* it the mountains aren't straight.  
They never have been.  
You and I can't fix them and we're not being asked to.  
But we can work on our own little bit path.  
You know what I mean, those little moments of inequity  
where somebody's up and somebody's down;  
Beloved, we do have a choice about participating in those.

In 1993 the town of Billings Montana made a choice.  
A group of white nationalists, the Northwest United Skinheads,  
began a campaign of intimidation  
against local residents of color, Native Americans and Jews.  
It was first disclosed on a Friday night when the Montana Association of Churches  
held an ecumenical worship service in town.  
Worshippers walking out to their cars after the service  
found hate flyers on their windshields  
targeting minorities and gays.  
A month later five men beat up a teenager in a racially motivated attack,  
and more and more hate flyers appeared.  
In September, tombstones in the Jewish cemetery were desecrated.  
In mid-October, the home of a Native American family  
was spray-painted with obscene and racist graffiti.  
Within days, the local painters' union  
and community volunteers repainted the home.  
Then on an evening in early December  
Dr. Brian Schnitzer was working in his basement  
while a babysitter watched five-year-old Isaac  
and 2-year-old Rachel in another room.  
Wife Tammie was out at a meeting.  
The double-paned window in Isaac's room  
was decorated with symbols of Hanukkah,

including a menorah, a dreidel, a Star of David  
and the words "Happy Hanukkah."

Schnitzer thought he heard a noise.

When he went upstairs, he found that Isaac's bedroom was cold,  
A piece of paving stone had been hurled through Isaac's window  
and was lying between the two beds.

Schnitzer called the police, the officers were sympathetic but advised him  
not to put symbols of the family religion in the windows.

Word of that advice got around, and it led a neighbor, Margie MacDonald,  
to go to her pastor at First Congregational United Church of Christ  
and she suggested they pass out paper menorahs

for members of the congregation to place in their windows.

Soon other congregations joined in, followed by many businesses.

Finally the religion editor of the *Billings Gazette*  
urged the publisher to put a full-page color image

of a menorah in the paper. The next Saturday

there were ten thousand menorahs in the windows of Billings, MT.

Vandals broke windows in some houses and businesses

where the paper menorahs were displayed,

but people continued to put them up.

One store manager posted a message on his sign board:

"Not in Our Town! No Hate. No violence. Peace on Earth."<sup>iii</sup>

Instead of doing further harm, that paving stone

hurled in an act of cowardice and hate united a whole community.

because the people of Billings attended to

the part of the Lord's way that wound past their front doors. AMEN.

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<sup>i</sup> There is much debate about the authorship and date of 2 Peter, but most scholars agree that the apostle Peter, who died c. CE 67, could not have written it because of word usage and references to things that happened after that time.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://bible.org/article/brief-note-textual-problem-2-peter-310>

<sup>iii</sup> A Stone Ignites a Community: Billings Stood Up to White Supremacists, Stories By SUSAN OLP  
solp@billingsgazette.com , Dec 2, 2013.