

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Matthew 10:40-42

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple - truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Sermon

Happy 4th of July weekend folks. Has anyone blown anything up yet? We were with my wife's family last night and stayed up late to light up the sky and blow out our ears. I think mine are still ringing. It is funny how this holiday has so many different emotions wrapped up in it. Freedom and independence, victory in war, patriotism and honoring of veterans. And, at least I believe, a prayer for peace.

Jeremiah was hanging out in the temple. It was the time of the Babylonian exile, where Israel and Judah were subdued and subjugated by this invading army. Many of the great people and artifacts were taken away, into exile. Jeremiah was hanging out in the temple and the prophet Hananiah comes in, sharing a prophecy of the end of the exile and the end of subjugation. It sounded to many like a prophecy of hope and of peace.

And Jeremiah was quick to say, "Amen" and to pray that this prophecy would come true. But then he became a bit more pragmatic. "The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Jeremiah calls out Hananiah's prophecy of peace as unlikely. It had been so long since the region has seen peace. It seemed that there was constant turmoil, both from foreign powers and within the Hebrew people. Peace sounded good, but don't count on it. And we get it, yes peace would be nice, but it isn't practical. Only an act of God could make it happen.

Vaclav Havel: a writer, philosopher, political dissident and 1st president of the Czech Republic once said: "Hope is not prognostication, it is an orientation of the spirit." Hope isn't about what is to come, a prophesy of the future peace. No, hope is a way of life, a view point into the world, it is a choice. We have a choice: we can choose to live in hope or we can choose to live in despair. If we live in despair, we live in inaction and the outcomes are predictable. But if we live in hope, the outcome is, at best, unpredictable.

So where do we start? How do we reorient our spirits to hope? There are two paths. One path is the hero's path. This is the path that looks at history and sees the great heroes who seemed to be divinely placed in the right place at the right time. George Washington, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, when the moment was right, they stepped up to the challenge. Right place at the right time, and they did something heroic. But there is something wrong with this path. It is a myth. Not one of these heroes just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Each of them have a longer history of work and preparation and training and action that lead to their historic moments. When we fall into this myth, believing change happens when you are in the right place at the right time, then we find that our first actions of hope and peace is to wait. Wait for the right moment.

But if the second path is right, the path of action and purposeful training and living, then our first step is “get to work”. Don’t wait, but hope now, act now, love now.

The house next to ours has been up for sale for the last three months. My wife and I have been curious neighbors, wondering what it is selling for, how it looks on the inside, but most of all, wondering just who our new neighbors will be when it is sold. Well yesterday was the big day. It wasn’t until early afternoon, as I was pulling out of the driveway to run an errand that I saw the three cars and the folks unloading boxes. The for sale sign was no longer in the yard. Our new neighbors were moving in. I texted my wife, “We have new neighbors!” Our plate was pretty full on Saturday, but we decided we would try to make something to take over, a welcome to the neighborhood gift. But by the time we were ready, the people had left to get another load of stuff, and we decided we could welcome them today instead.

There is something fun and exciting about welcoming new folks, whether they are new to the neighborhood, new to work or school, or new to church. Welcoming someone new has all the hope and possibility of who this person or persons might be and who they might become.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus was giving his final preparations for the disciples as they were preparing to go out for the first time on their own, to share the good news, “The Kingdom of God has drawn near!” And the imperative is on “welcome”. Those who welcome you, those who welcome others, those whom you welcome. Hospitality is the bedrock of hope, the foundation of peace. How can you be in conflict with someone who is welcomed? How can we be against someone who is friend?

Hospitality, the way that we make people feel welcomed, is one of the most ancient of practices within the community of faith. For Christians, hospitality is hoped for when we go out, and it is expected when others come to us. They will know we are Christians by our love, our welcome, our hospitality. It is an orientation of the spirit. May we go and welcome peace in our world today.