



Joy Mennonite Newsletter January 2005

Pastors Corner

Many of our favorite scriptures for Advent are from the book of Isaiah. We love Isaiah because of the passages we interpret as foretelling the birth of Jesus. There is however a more powerful way to read these scriptures if we can understand the prophets concern was for their time and place and Jesus life so filled their hopes and dreams and their understanding of truth that it reads like foretelling of his life. By reading the prophets word as only referring to Jesus we fail to understand how the truth the prophets spoke of is truth for all generations and most important of all, we fail to hear the prophetic word for our difficult times.

We have difficulty with interpretation because we live on the other side of power from that of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah and the nation of Judah lived under the constant threat of an invasion by more powerful nations. Isaiah understood the world as imperfect now, but with a holy imagination dreamed of a world where humans and animals would live together in perfect harmony. Isaiah dreamed of the time when weapons of war would be turned into productive tools to produce life-giving sustenance for everyone. Today we live on the side of power. Consequently we tend to think that life in the present should offer us all our heart desires. If our desires are threatened we can resort to violence to obtain our desires. Because we are not powerless we are not inclined to be dreamers, looking with hope and anticipation to a future shaped by the spirit of God.

When the Federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed most people emerged from this experience with anger and a desire for revenge. But out of the rubble came one who in the pain of losing a loved one in the bombing also came to understand that one could come to forgive and with forgiveness comes healing. Just like the prophets of biblical times the message of forgiveness brought hate letters and accusations of not caring about their loss because he would not join them in their hatred of the enemy. We can imagine that Isaiah was surrounded by angry people who were crying for revenge as they were forced to march into exile to a foreign land. In this context Isaiah could dream and envision a time of restoration, not only for Israel but also for all humanity. In the second chapter of Isaiah we read of Isaiah's dream that one day the kings of the earth would see God as He had and their violent behavior would change and there would be peace.

In the seventh chapter of Isaiah we see another role for the prophet, to speak the word with certainty. King Ahaz and the people of Judah were shaking with fear because of an imminent invasion. In his fear Ahaz decided to form an alliance with the king of Assyria.

Isaiah spoke with great certainty that Ahaz should not form such an alliance. Ahaz would not listen. We can imagine the familiar words, of course I do not want to go to war, no one likes to go to war, but I am being forced, I have no other options. Isaiah said Ahaz should ask God for a sign. Ahaz refused. Isaiah said, then God will give you a sign, a woman will give birth to a child. You shall call his name Emmanuel, meaning God with us. The child shall eat Curds and honey and shall grow up knowing right from wrong. Now remember that this sign is meant to verify the word of the Lord, spoken by Isaiah concerning forming an alliance with a foreign king. In that context it seems to say that living under the rule of these invading kings is not the end of the world, God will be with them, you can name your child to represent this truth. The common food of curds and honey will still be available. And most important of all, the child will learn right from wrong. Under an alliance with a foreign king this may not be true, in fact it proved not to be true. When Ahaz formed an alliance with Assyria in order to fit into their culture, Ahaz had altars built for the worship of their gods.

The dreams and visions of peace that Isaiah envisioned are more relevant today than ever. There are about twenty wars raging in the world today. We have war because we cannot envision peace. The vision of peace begins with those who feel threatened by those more powerful than they. It seems the powerful have no capacity to envision peace, because they believe they can create peace with their power. When one cannot envision peace one feels compelled to go to war when threatened. I know that I am very naive when I speak this way when I do not know what it is like to be threatened by people with evil intentions, except for the way we all feel threatened now that the world has weapons that can destroy us all. We must also understand that now is the time to prepare ourselves for what may lie ahead. The world today needs the prophets who can dream and envision a peaceful world and also one who can speak with certainty to the rulers of the nations that they are doing wrong in their warring efforts to bring peace.

I wish for all of you blessings and happiness in this holiday season and for the New Year. Moses Mast

Moses Mast

Juanita Conrad, only two months short of her 93rd birthday, passed away the Saturday before Christmas. She had little family, having no children and out living her husbands. The one thing I know she wanted more

than anything was to be able to live out her last years at home. Thankfully she was able to do that.

Juanita was a longtime member of Saint James Episcopal Church. She was "Rosie the Riveter" in WW2. She was an artist. She'd been a cake decorator, a secretary, she'd raised fancy dogs. She worked for 17 years on a ceramic mosaic wall at the community college, she took wonderful care of two husbands (one at a time). And somehow she became a part of my family. I'm really glad that she did. She needed a little help at times and gave each of us a chance to be special to someone in ways we may have never known without her. We miss her and ask God to take care of her now.

The Hostetler Family

December revisited:

- **DEC. 12-**The Mennonite church USA distributed a fund collected at the annual meeting and challenged congregations to multiply it. Joy church used our share to buy food and James Branum increased its value by cooking it and members paid for their meal in a free will offering.
- **Dec. 19-**Church members went caroling in the neighborhood. The highlight was singing for a woman one hundred years old and still does four hours of volunteer work five days a week.
- **DEC. 26-** For the Sunday school hour we went to Martha Shoemakers house for a short time of singing and scripture reading. Martha had been in the hospital with heart problems. She seems to be doing well.

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Coming Events:

- **Jan. 23-** World Fellowship Sunday. We hope to receive Norman and Linda Berry as members on that day.
- **Jan. 30-** A peace walk will be held in the afternoon to launch the beginning of the season of non-violence. The season of non-violence is marked by the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (Jan. 30) to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (April 3.)

In Closing

It would be wrong not to mention the disaster in Asia, but I don't know what to say. The devastation was unimagineable.

My hope would be that each of us, in our own way, make whatever contribution we can. Whether it is in time, money, prayer or whatever. If you can't do anything to help in that effort, maybe you can help someone here instead. There will always be those in need.

Terry

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