

December 1, 2019 'Bursting into Flower!' Rev. Jane Courtright

Isaiah 2:1-5 Matthew 24:32-44

Memory is a strange thing, isn't it?
I've observed that as people grow older,
they tend to remember more about their childhood
than about things that happened 10 minutes ago!

And I've read that eventually, a lot of people
begin to remember events of their childhood
that they haven't remembered for decades!

Of course, our memories can be very selective
(like our hearing at times?)

Even though we do remember painful things that happened,
many of us still tend to see times in the past as 'golden times!'

I remember a minister
who moved to a country church from a busy city church.
He was constantly telling his congregation
how great life was in the city
and how he couldn't wait to go back there.

When he did return to the city,
I heard he spent hours telling that new congregation
stories of how wonderful life had been in the country.
He was always looking back to a 'golden age!'

This happens even more when we look back in history.
I hear a lot about mainline churches in the 1940's, 50's & 60's!
I hear that churches were packed full...everyone attended.
Surely this is somewhat of an exaggeration.
Sure a higher percentage of people went to church,
but certainly, not everybody attended church!

All through their history, the Jewish people also had golden ages which they constantly talked about.

One golden age was 40 years of wandering in the wilderness when Moses led the people out of oppression in Egypt.

We've read that story in the book of Exodus!
We know about the hunger, thirst, danger, whining...
and Moses' impatience and anger at these people.

Yet, later in their collective memories,
that time was seen as a golden era.
The Psalms are full of praise for those days!

Another golden time,
(and the king who was known as the 'golden king,')
was the reign of David. Yet we know that David was no saint!
His worst sin was his acquisition of Bathsheba
and the murder of her husband! Despite all that AND MORE,
David was still seen as the most glorious king ever in Israel.

And David did accomplish great things.
He united the warring factions of Israel.
He was a king of immense courage, style and charisma...
and he never did stop following God.

So I guess it's no surprise that in our Hebrew Scripture reading,
Isaiah promises a NEW GOLDEN ERA of justice, prosperity and safety!

This passage was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah declares that

"There's a day coming when the mountain of God's House
will be **The Mountain** - solid, towering over all mountains.

All nations will river toward it, people from all over set out for it. God will show us the way so we can live the way we're made."

AND

"No more will nation fight nation; they won't play war anymore. Come, let's live in the light of God!

So, here we are, at the very beginning of Advent!
Has the birth of Jesus ushered in another, better, golden era?

Let's be honest. The answer has to be a yes and a no. Anyone looking at our world today can see that human beings still rape and murder, steal, embezzle and plunder, we still abuse power and more than 12% of people are still starving!

Advent can be a serious sober time.
A time for reflection, for stepping back & getting ready.
Preparing for a king....hence purple
(as I shared during the children's message)

But of course, Advent can be pretty grim out there
in the secular world as well.

All that anxiety about choosing the perfect Christmas gifts, about getting those cards out, about preparing food for the feast (especially when family and friends are all on different diets!), about which family to spend Christmas with (or all of them?!)

The season can be hard to handle....
Maybe that's why more relationships break down during this season more than any other time of the year.

So, with all this Christmas misery,
just where is the Advent hope?
The Advent hope is that this golden era,
God's way of doing things,

will one day permeate the entire universe.
Thank God that we do experience and help create
pockets of heaven, even here, even now,
but someday, IN FULL.

Isaiah uses the image of mountains, of walking God's paths,
of beating swords into plowshares
& spears into pruning hooks,
of learning war no more.

Jesus uses the image of the fig tree's leaves.
Jesus says that the fig tree, in winter,
might seem dead and gone,
but it can't be stopped from blooming,
because new life is in it,
just waiting to burst into flower.

God promises that with love,
that some day, the whole earth
will also burst into flower....
The flowering of the realm of God!

Reminds me of these words:
"I feel the earth move under my feet,
I feel the sky tumbling down, tumbling down!"
These words sound just as violent and scary
as words from today's gospel reading, but actually,
these words are the lyrics to a love song!

Could it be that today's Advent passages of Advent hope
are actually God's love song to us?!
Just a hint of Jesus- the great gift given to US?

KEEP ALERT, FOR GOD'S SAKE! Amen.