

## Waiting on the World to Change

### How Stressed are You: a test

Research has shown that the more stressed we are, the more we notice subtle changes. We can test a person's stress level by showing them two *almost* identical objects and then measuring how long it takes for them to spot the differences. So let's try this little test to see how stressed you are this morning, shall we? In a moment you will see a picture of two almost identical dolphins playing in the surf. Raise your hand the moment you notice a difference between the two. [GO]

"We live in a no-wait age of instant everything: instant oatmeal, Minute Rice, one-hour dry cleaning, digital photos, drive-through restaurants, microwave cooking, high speed internet. Nothing seems to stress us out more than having to wait. Yet Advent is a season of waiting. Waiting for the Messiah. Waiting for God to do something. And that might make us uncomfortable.

### Waiting Room

When I was a boy I would go to the doctor twice a month to get an allergy shot. Dr. Jones' office was just at the other end of the shopping plaza from my Grandfather's bakery. I can see myself coming away from heat of the big oven, the clatter of bread-pans and the smell of cinnamon and yeast, and walking the length of the plaza and through the door with the doctor's name in gold letters on the glass. (I always admired the talent of the people who painted to letters on other inside of the glass of office doors because it not only had to be perfect, they had to write everything backwards.)

But then, the dreaded *Waiting Room*. I didn't dread the needle, but the intense boredom of waiting in the quiet, warm, disinfected waiting room. I liked Dr. Jones. He was a kindly, quiet man crippled by polio, who wore a metal brace on his leg. So I would wait and listen for the sound from behind the door of Dr. Jones leg brace clicking and clacking as he rose from his chair to call me in. It was *boring*. I would sit in one of the dozen vinyl covered chairs, sink my warm bum into the cool vinyl, and ah, that felt good! But in a few moments the chair would warm up, and I would move to the next chair and enjoy the coolness of that chair until it ran out. And moving from chair to chair, using up the coolness of them all, until the first chair would be cooled enough to begin the process again.

There is nothing worse than having to *wait* with absolutely nothing to do. So I learned to always bring a good book. And so too, in our journey through Advent. Advent is a season of meditation in the church when we waiting on the world to change, waiting for God to work in our lives, to our world. But we must have something to *do* while we wait – a good book like the Book of Isaiah the Prophet. He is . . .

### A Prophet of the Great Transformation

"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."

He was a man waiting – waiting on the world to change. That world *was* going to change. And he could *see* it. That world would emerge one day from a dark and violent age. But human culture would need to undergo a great transformation, and Isaiah believed that his God had already started that process. A revolution in human spirituality throughout the world was already underway in the days of Isaiah, in later part of the eighth century B.C. and would continue for centuries to come. And he could *see* it for he was a *prophet*. Unfortunately, though

it was going to get a lot worse before it got better. This was not going to be a straight through process, there would be many setbacks. It would happen to certain people before others. It's always darkest before the dawn.

Isaiah son of Amoz was a *pre-exilic* prophet. In other words he lived in the generations before the time of the exile. But the "*Vision of Isaiah the Prophet*" – the book that bears his name, would cover well beyond that time. There is, described within this book, a before and an after. An earlier period called "the former times" and a later period called "the latter times." And these two ages would be so different from each other that, not since the days of Noah' flood would the events of any period of history so divide the ages. And we live in the "latter days", and Isaiah lived in the "former days." So let's go back to those *former* days for a moment at see what *he* saw . . .

### **From where he sat.**

He lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B. C. during is the "divided kingdom" period of Israel's history. He lived in Jerusalem, the capital the Southern kingdom. In the Northern Kingdom, the traumatic separation of the nation has proved to be both politically and economically successful. The land is filled with silver and gold (7) but the separation has been disastrous for the North spiritually . "Their land is filled with idols" (8). The Northerners are "a people who walk in darkness". If we look down to verse 9, their lifestyle has become so pagan, that they are no longer welcome to come South to Mount Zion anymore even for a visit. In this dysfunctional family, there's a restraining order against the "house of Jacob" (that is, the people up North).

But Isaiah can see a *day* when even they will be ready to walk with God again: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great *light*; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a *light* has dawned. (Isa 9:2)

In the meantime, the ruthless Assyrian Empire would gobble up the Northern Kingdom in a bloody invasion. And the proud and rich of the North would be sent away in chains to Assyria. But a handful of survivors, a remnant, would "*see the light*" and flee South to Jerusalem as refugees. (4:2b,3). But eventually even Jerusalem itself would be surrounded by the Assyrian hordes. The darkness would close in. Isaiah lived through some of the grimmest days the people of God had ever experienced.

Yet he preached about this great transformation in human spirituality. And for them, that it was kind of hard to understand. For the days had never been so dark. But Isaiah, the great prophet of the great transformation remains a *believer*. This present crisis, this invasion, is in fact the turning point in the history of God's people. It may look bad today, but this is going somewhere. We're waiting on the world to change. And it would. And how would they know that? He says to them, "Lord himself will give you . . .

### **A Sign**

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" **Isa 7:14**

At this point in the midst of this national crisis, Isaiah the prophet stands up in the assembly of his people, points to certain very prominent, and visibly pregnant woman and said, "You see this young woman who is with child? By the time her child is born, this present crisis will be over."

And who was that young woman? . . . "It appears the young queen who was carrying the royal heir. Officially they would call him Hezekiah. But his mother would call him Immanuel. God with us, a name connects him with the Dynasty of David. Because God promised to *be*

with the sons of David in a very special way. The child in her womb was God's anointed. In Hebrew the *Messiah*. In those dark days, days of Isaiah, the birth of an *heir* in the court of King Ahaz, was a *sign*. In the birth of *this* child, the security of David's throne would be guaranteed.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." **Isa 9:6**

Even in the face of an invasion, they could *hope*. The world was going to change. It was going to get better. The future would put to right the wrongs of the past. New political realities would emerge that would restore the power and glory of the house of David.

But these were not just strange incomprehensible uttering of Isaiah in eighth century Jerusalem as a convenient source of prophecies for the church to later apply to the birth of Jesus Christ. These statements that we treasure around Christmas *meant something* to the people who first heard them. They needed to hear them because they were waiting on the world to change.

And we, too need a sign. We need some hope that this world is going to change. And for us, it is this cup and this bread. The apostle says, "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*." "The Lord's Table is something to do while we await the return of our glorious king, robed in majesty, power and might. We "proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*

And what are we waiting for? How will the world change? According to Isaiah, the change the world is waiting for *is* . . .

### **The universal worship of a Sovereign God**

"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

The creator of the world, who never abandoned his world, called Israel his chosen people to be the starting point of his redeeming purposes for this world. This God, has now in Jesus' life death and resurrection, drawn together the threads of Israel's long destiny, in order to deal with evil in the world, and to begin dramatically, the creation of a *new world*. This new world is not superimposed upon the old one, but *grows out of its very womb* in a great act of new creation like the oak from the acorn. " (NT Wright)

Isaiah could see a day when the former days would become the later days, and the worship of the one true Sovereign God would be universal, but how to transform the culture of the entire human race? What was needed was . . .

### **A vehicle of cultural transformation**

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."

People who study how cultures are change say that in order for cultures to be radically transformed there needs to be two things happening: first an extended period of disruption. – for example a series of natural disasters and wars, and secondly the presence of an idea that can be easily communicated. According to this theory, cultural change happens s much the same way a *virus* spreads through the body.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia describes this phenomena of the Internet age as the *Viral phenomena*. Given the technologies we have, marketing messages, clothing and fashion trends, emails, videos, advice *anything* is able to replicate itself and spread rapidly, globally.

“Going viral” has become a common way to describe how thoughts, information and trends move into and through the human population. "We are all susceptible to the pull of powerful ideas. Like mass hysteria. Or a tune that gets into your head that you keep on humming all day until you spread it to someone else. Jokes. Urban legends. Crackpot religions. Marxism. No matter how smart we get, there is always this deep irrational part that makes us potential hosts for self-replicating information." ((Snow Crash 1992 )

Isaiah saw a day when the message of God would “go viral” in the world. Isaiah saw that this would lead to . . .

### **Conflict resolution on a global level**

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore”.

On the best-seller lists today, many of the top selling non-fiction books are by atheists making the point that it’s the world’s *religions* are at the heart of the world’s conflicts. Systems of religious belief that can never be reconciled.

(Eg: Teddy bear named Mohamed.)

"Centuries of institutional, political, and intellectual development . . .tend to obscure the importance of *compassion* in religion. All too often the religion that dominates the public discourse seems to express an institutional egotism: my faith is better than yours! . . . Once people interject themselves into their beliefs, they can become quarrelsome, officious, or even unkind. Compassion is not a popular virtue, because it demands laying aside of the ego that we identify with our deepest self: so people often prefer being right to being compassionate."

Karen Armstrong

I believe that in modern times, the church has lost it’s message because it lost it’s compassion. . . Throughout it’s long history, and beginning every early very soon after the lifetime of Jesus, the church took a wrong turn. The church laid aside Jesus’ message of love and compassion and took up the tools of force and power. The challenge of our day is to lay down the weapons and once again take up the tools of partnership and peace.

We must “ beat the plowshare into the sword and the pruning hook into the spear”. But the culture of violence and war is so much a part of our thinking, it’s hard to imagine a different kind of world, even for just a few moments. Yet we must. We must keep coming back on a personal level to that which would reverse the process – beat the sword back into the plowshare and the spear back into a pruning hook. In fact in our day, the stakes are so high, the next big war could destroy us.

And that brings us to this Table. We come here confess . . .

When the Lord comes into our lives, he wants to take the things we are using to hurt others and re-shape them, take them apart and reconstruct them and beat them into things that will bless and help others. No, maybe we aren’t using guns or grenades in our everyday lives, but there are other things. What might they be? Our hands?/ mouth?/ influence ? abilities? money? What’s disturbing the peace in our lives this morning? Could be: an addiction of some sort, a sexual relationship, racial hatred, profanity, a grudge, jealousy, greed. Spears and swords are simply instruments we use to break the rules to get you own way.

Deal with those, and we will be . . .

### **Going Places.**

Therefore Isaiah says, “*Come*, house of Jacob, let us *walk* in the light of the LORD.”

In the historical context that I described for you earlier, this “house of Jacob” Isaiah is appealing to is the Northern people, the people who walk in darkness. This prophecy is a call to invite our world to walk in the light, It invites us to go out into our world and *be* the change we want to see.

Because the world is waiting.

Perhaps we need to heed the admonition of Dr. Seuss in his famous book Oh, the Places You'll Go! (Of which I can offer you this morning only the condensed version)

Congratulations!

Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places! . .

You're off and away!

Out there things can happen  
and frequently do

to people as brainy

and footsy as you. . .

You'll be on your way up!

You'll be seeing great sights!

You'll join the high fliers

who soar to high heights. . .

[Now we come to the very important statement]

You can get so confused

that you'll start in to race

down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace

and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,

headed, I fear, toward a *most useless place*.

### ***The Waiting Place...***

...for people just waiting.

Waiting for a train to go

or a bus to come, or a plane to go

or the mail to come, or the rain to go

or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow

or waiting around for a Yes or a No

or waiting for their hair to grow.

Everyone is just waiting.

Waiting for the fish to bite

or waiting for wind to fly a kite

or waiting around for Friday night

or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake

or a pot to boil, or a Better Break

or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants  
or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.  
Everyone is just waiting.  
[Now what do you suppose the good Dr. Suess say next?]

**NO!**

That's not for you!  
Somehow you'll escape  
all that waiting and staying.  
You'll find the bright places  
where Boom Bands are playing.

With banner flip-flapping,  
once more you'll ride high!  
Ready for anything under the sky.  
Ready because you're *that* kind of a guy! . . .

### **And someone is waiting for you to change their world**

*As your going to all those places you will go throughout this season, you are going to meet someone who is waiting on the world to change. Searching for something more than a jolly time and a little Christmas booze. That person will be waiting for you to share Christ with them. Their heart will be aching and longing for just a little peace on earth.*

Jesus comes to us as God to **reveal** God and **be** God on earth. We are here today to proclaim through Jesus Christ the forgiveness of sin to all people. It is his purpose to overrule the power of evil throughout the whole wide earth. And even nations that seem so completely in the grip of darkness and despair are always in his sovereign control. He is King of the Nations and He is coming.

#### **Move to Table:**

This is the joyful feast of the people of God. I believe this is to be a life changing moment. If we are really waiting for Jesus to come, to renew his church in power, to reveal his glory in the nations, to beat the swords into plowshares, to bring earth on earth, then that beings in our our hearts.

I'd ask you to bow your head, close your eyes. Your hands are laying open on your lap. Pray with me.

1. Imagine a weapon laying in your hands: a sword, slingshot, pistol whip, something like that. - let this represent the thing in your life you are using to hurt other people with.
2. Name that thing before God. Write the name or word that describes what your using to hurt others. Say "Lord, *this* is the thing I am using to hurt others."
3. Now close your hands on that thing, grasp it firmly in your hands and ask God to change that weapon into something that will help other people. We are asking God today to turn our swords into plowshares, our spears into prunninghooks. "Lord transform my  
mouth  
intellect  
ability to do (*whatever it is . . .*)

Now open your hands and offer that thing to God.