

December 10 – Second Sunday of Advent, Peace

Advent. The season of anticipation which might be just another way of saying a season of waiting. Waiting. Just the thought of waiting can make us anxious. Waiting rooms. Waiting in line. Waiting for results. Waiting for the weekend. Nerve wracking at worst. Boring at best sometimes. God's people have long been a waiting and watching people.

Israel, our ancestors in the faith, were well acquainted with waiting. Waiting for God to hear and act and move on their behalf. And woven through the waiting is faith. Waiting and faith go hand in hand, really. Waiting simple means that something we are expecting simply hasn't arrived yet. We don't wait on that which we know isn't coming. We only wait on that which we trust to arrive.

And those who wait on the Lord will receive what has been expected. Israel received Jesus in the flesh. We wait on Jesus to come again to restore, resurrect and reset everything to fullness of God's design.

As we wait together, let us hear some words that came from the prophet Isaiah to the people of God who were waiting the coming of a Messiah, a Savior...

Isaiah 40: 1-11

¹ *Comfort, comfort my people! says your God.*

² *Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,*

and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,

that her penalty has been paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins!

³ *A voice is crying out: "Clear the Lord's way in the desert!*

Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!

⁴ *Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened.*

Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain.

⁵ *The Lord's glory will appear, and all humanity will see it together;*

the Lord's mouth has commanded it."

⁶ *A voice was saying: "Call out!" And another said, "What should I call out?"*

All flesh is grass; all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ *The grass dries up and the flower withers*

when the Lord's breath blows on it. Surely the people are grass.

⁸ *The grass dries up; the flower withers, but our God's word will exist forever.*

⁹ *Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout,*

messenger Jerusalem! Raise it; don't be afraid; say to the cities of Judah,

"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ *Here is the Lord God, coming with strength, with a triumphant arm, bringing his reward with him and his payment before him.*

¹¹ *Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap. He will gently guide the nursing ewes.*

Last week we remembered together that God has, in fact, torn open the heavens and come down. God has fulfilled what God has promised. Today, we look again at the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah tells us that God speaks comfort and compassion over us. And the message is good news.

I fell in love with this phrase, *“proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended.”* What a transactional and businesslike set of words in the midst of a proclamation of compassion and comfort. Her compulsory service has ended. The time of God’s people’s devotion as obligation or duty or work for reward, for gain, for payment of the debt of sin...it is ended. In the coming of Jesus, the quiet coming of Jesus, Israel’s time of compulsory service has ended.

Does living a life in Christ, a “good” life, ever feel like a life of compulsory service? Does our life of sharing hope, peace, love and joy ever feel like something we have to do rather than something we are freed to do? I think it can and I know that this mindset is a way of thinking that God is working long and hard to reset in my own life.

Jesus came to set prisoners free – not to unleash law breakers from jail in a way that endangers the rest of society – Jesus came to set free those who are imprisoned by sin, shame, guilt, or the thought that to follow Jesus and to be godly is to be beholding to God, to owe God. It can be tough to think through the freedom we have in Christ because our everyday life is built on earning a living, earning our keep, and earning our way into success. We can have a hard time understanding that we used to owe God something – a debt created by our sin – but now we owe God nothing once we receive the gift of grace that comes through Jesus.

Jesus didn’t just come and do us a favor. Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection, was not some kind of divine “now you owe me one” situation. Jesus came to enter into our mess and become the payment for what we already owed to God. We do not have to wait for the comfort and compassion of God anymore.

God has come. God has come to comfort God’s people. God has come and in other good news...God has a lap. Have you ever just needed to crawl into the lap of God? Today does anyone here just need to crawl up onto the lap of God? I mean it. Think about God’s lap with me for a minute.

Laps are funny things. They only appear when we sit. There is no lap when we stand and walk or run around. There is no lap when we are busy and in motion. There is only a lap when we take time to sit. There is a lap when there is rest. There is a lap that is designed for more than a laptop computer. And is a lap really a lap when we sit in front of a desk? I'm not sure that counts, but I'll leave that for more serious philosophers and move on to God's lap again. The lap of God is present even as God sits on the very throne of heaven. What a lap to have available to us.

This time of year we probably associate lap-sitting with Santa, but I would invite us to think beyond that seasonal image. The lap of God that is available to us isn't a lap of invitation to spew our wish list for life that God is somehow obligated to fulfill if we are good boys and girls. The lap of God is a place to abide. A place of comfort, safety, and nourishment. The lap of God is a place for us to find peace.

Oh, how we long for peace and for comfort, in this world filled with chaos. Fatigue and exhaustion seem to be the order of the day for many of us. The fatigue might be physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual. But for so many, the fatigue is there.

And I don't know about you, but I find that fatigue can become normal. In our multitasking, over-committing, online 24/7, electricity-lit world, tired and fatigued can sometimes become like a badge of honor. I've noticed that 'tired' has become a common, socially acceptable response to the small talk question, 'how are you doing?' Fatigue means I gave 110%, or left it all on the field. Fatigue can become expected and normal while a well-rested life can feel lazy or less-than. And still we wonder why God leaves us waiting and wanting when we are supposed to be able to find rest and peace and comfort in Him.

God's lap is open. God's comforting arms are ready to hold us. But we have to climb up. And as I was reminded earlier this week in a quote from D.L. Moody, *"Faith is the gift of God. [and I would add peace is the gift of God] So is the air, but you have to breathe it; so is bread, but you have to eat it; so is water, but you have to drink it."*

Who besides me has to admit that I just walk past God sitting right on his throne waiting for me...waiting for me to pause, waiting for me to trust, waiting for me to breathe in and breathe out, waiting for me come to him for peace, for comfort, for rest?

Today I want to offer comfort and rest to each of us in the form of a packet of hot cocoa. And as you take one for yourself I want you to take one to give to someone else who needs a little comfort. You might already know exactly who you will give this to or you might hold onto it in a purse or pocket or car until you run into someone, but I want

us to spread the comfort and peace that we have received. There is already a label on it that says, "Tidings of Comfort and Joy from me and Pana FUMC."

I was inspired toward this from an Advent devotional I read this week as well as Jesus' own words in John 14:27, "*27Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.*" We give differently than the world. We give what we have received, which is peace.

I would gladly have some help to pass out the cocoa packets so that all might receive.

Let us pray...