

Through the Minutes of the Hour
December 1, 2013
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Kind of a strange set of readings for our first Sunday of Advent, huh?

You'd think we'd get stuff from the more traditional, Christmas-y readings.

Scripture about angels and shepherds. The Star of Bethlehem...

... At least you'd think there'd be something about Mary.

(No movie reference intended)...

But nope. We get these. And they're fine texts, don't get me wrong.

More than fine, in fact.

Last week I mentioned that I felt the lectionary people

were on fire with their picks for the season.

There's been intention behind each one. Not just bored, passionless habit.

They really seem to care what we talk about and think about, this time around...

...and I like that.

In the weeks leading up to today, the start of Advent,

We've meditated on patience. On hope.

Last Sunday was "Christ the King" Sunday, and we talked about

all of the ways Jesus turned the upside down values of the world on their head.

The messiah—this sort of "Holy Royalty"—

--coming to the world as a "worthless" homeless man.

And in all three of these most recent weeks, we were left with this feeling of *waiting*, right?

Patience... something we experience while waiting.

Hope... something we experience while waiting.

Expectation... something we experience while waiting.

And now the Christmas season is *here*.

---But wait! It's just Advent. An entire season, of yes---more *waiting!*

And, in fact, the waiting just gets more intense from here, doesn't it?

The Christmas season---shoo!

Waiting in traffic. Waiting in lines. Waiting for online orders to arrive.

Waiting for flights. Waiting for Christmas lists so we can know what to give.

And, of course, waiting for whatever gifts we hope to be given.

...And above all of this, in the deepest of spiritual worth,

we wait to fully celebrate that most beautiful gift from God we could ever hope to receive,

and that is the light and love of Christ's life in the world.

So suddenly these readings start to make a little more sense, right?

....For this first day of meditating on the start of Jesus' time with us.

For what we celebrate together with all of these songs, and foods, and decorations.

These Mary-less, shepherd-less, starless, readings---

---these strangely *everyday* scriptures---

They start to become a little more understandable

as we enter into all of this *waiting*.

(...And if not for you *yet*, please be *patient*, because *hopefully* they will soon.

Just gotta wait. ... See what we did there? All ties in...)

From our reading in Isaiah, Ch 2:

2 In days *to come* the mountain of the Lord's house *will* be established as the highest of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; all the nations will stream to it. 3 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; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion *will* go forth *instruction*, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He will judge between the nations, and will arbitrate for many peoples; they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. 5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

The Jewish prophet, here, speaking on the day God's glory will overwhelm the world.

---On a day when people will stop fighting. No more war. When *love* will override all else.

And all of this, Christianity believes to be a prophecy for the coming of *Christ*, right?

---*Jesus of Nazareth* as the Christ, more specifically.

(Yeshua bar Yosef—Jesus, son of Joseph)

The Prince of Peace. (What a beautiful title)

Isaiah speaks of a day when the light of the Lord will fill the world,

and we'll be blessed to walk in it---

---the path in front of us clearly seen.

And in all of it, there's this *waiting*, right?

And, some very reasonably argue that we're *still* waiting on a lot of this.

---That this messianic prophecy---this coming of the messiah---hasn't even yet been fulfilled!

(Modern day members of the Jewish community, of course.)

...And they bring up a great point that a lot of Christians don't want to hear:

And that is, the undeniable *fact* that not all of this stuff has happened, since Jesus lived and died.

Some of you guys might have already heard this story over the years we've been together, but...

I was sitting in a van, driving through Jerusalem.

We'd spent a bunch of days already with our Jewish tour guide, Moshe,

And all of us felt a great bond, together. Good friendships were formed, lasting way longer than the trip.

Anyway... one of the Christian ladies with us---

---I guess she started feeling awkward being so close with someone who didn't believe what we believed as we all visited these holy *Christian* sites, together.

And, at one point, she got it into her head that it would be a good idea to confront the situation.

(oof!)

I remember, she leaned over my shoulder from the back seat.

She tapped Moshe's arm, and she says,

"Moshe?...Why don't you believe Jesus was the messiah?"

Ugh! *Why* she thought this would be a good idea, I can't figure.

Was she trying to convert him? Was it just curiosity? I dunno.

But she asked him, all the same, and I can still feel the awkwardness stab, just remembering.

Silence filled the van.

One of those tight, painful pauses, like when your big-brother's

about to punch you in arm after sighting a Volkswagen Beetle!

But Moshe kept his cool, gotta give him that.

Breaking that pause, he very calmly answered her:

"Simple," he said. "Because Jesus didn't fulfill the prophecy of the messiah. The prophecy said the *messiah* would bring peace to the world. And there is still no peace. That *was* the prophecy, so Jesus *wasn't* the messiah. I believe he was a good man, and a *holy* man;" he continued, "but because of this, he was not the person Isaiah spoke of in the scriptures."

...Oh and youch! That was about the end of that!

Great argument! Especially while driving around the streets of Israel,

where all you have to do is glance out the car window

to see that people have definitely *not* exchanged their semi-automatics for plowshares.

...People are still *waiting*. Jews and Christians alike.

As Christians, we might not be waiting for the *messiah* to come

(at least not for the first time around, anyway),

But we're all still waiting for that peace.

That beautiful peace of God to fill us up, then fill the world.

And the *wait* has been a whole lot longer than any line for a Black Friday sale at Best Buy.

Our *waiting* happens far past and before the weeks of Advent,
 as we remember and anticipate feeling again
 the joy of Jesus' life entering our world, and our lives.

But there are some things to remember here,
 as we embrace patience, and hope,
 and expectation in our waiting through these very sacred and holy hours.

See, in all of this, we wait for a certain time to come---we wait for a certain hour---
 But what we tend to forget in all of this waiting is the importance of each of the *minutes*
 that come between eleven and midnight. ---Between now and later.

This is the truth these very non-Christmasy, *everyday* scriptures bring back to our hearts.
 And that's why these lectionary folks, for this year---wow. Nice job.

Let's look a little closer at this prophecy from Isaiah.

Verse 3:

3 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; that he may *teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.*" For out of Zion will go forth *instruction*, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

See, just like Moshe said---the thing about prophecy is,

it's gotta eventually *happen* in order to be accurate.

...Did this happen?

Absolutely, it happened. This Prince of Peace,
he absolutely came out of Jerusalem and *taught us the way*.

Jesus absolutely brought forth *instruction*, didn't he?

And I believe he also lived in the hope, that with all of this, we might *walk* in his *paths*.

We finish up with this section from Isaiah, in verse 5:

5 O house of Jacob, come, *let us walk* in the light of the LORD!

And here comes that *waiting*, right?

...Is *this* not the part we're all still waiting on? Christians, and Jews alike?

See, we always look for the end result. The finish. The final package.

But we, a lot of times, neglect those moments between, don't we?

We've seen the coming of the Lord.

We've seen God work in the lives and world around us

in miraculous ways—through Christ-- to bring the light of God to our hearts...

...to clearly show us the path in front of us!

But have we taken the steps yet, to get from that moment to that later place and time?

Friends, this part of the prophecy wasn't up to Jesus, it's up to *us*.

Peace is not some *thing* on its own,

that exists as some kind of separate entity that will either come or not come.

It's an action. An agreement. A way of LIVING. Between you and me.

WE make peace. Peace doesn't just come on its own.

And we make it, or we don't make it,

through each minute that passes from this hour into the next.

And it's not just something that happens once.

It's something *we're* responsible for creating between us,

over and over and over and over again.

From the minute we're born, until the minute we pass on from here.

And thank God for God's love. For God's care.

For the fact that God showed us how to do it, through the life of Christ.

Through the Christ who was Jesus of Nazareth---Yeshua bar Yosef. (Jesus son of Joseph.)

That person whose birth we're celebrating all month

with all of this great music, and food, and all of these decorations.

And we're reminded of this truth in Jesus' own words,

from that everyday piece of scripture [our liturgist] read today from Matthew, Chapter 24.

...The one that reminds us that between one moment and the next,

there are a lot of minutes of a lot of *doing*.

And it's a confusion on our part to think that
the beginning and the end of all of our *waiting*,
is all that matters.

Life is what happens between the beginning and the end,
and it's our call not to look for God's promise only in the last of it,
But to *live* in God's promise and God's love
throughout all of that time *between*---in all of the normal stuff of our normal lives.
And if we don't do it in the now---in the everyday, in the every minute---
---we're going to be waiting a real long time to see it happen, won't we?

These Christmas moments, they're beautiful, and they're special.
They're a part of the year that *remind* us of the joy we know in knowing God.
...But I'm kind of glad the scripture we read today was everyday scripture.
Because strangely enough, that everyday stuff
really brought out the deeper meaning of Christmas.
They remind us that the coming of Emmanuel---God With Us---
Brought the light of the Lord to us in such a way that we were able
to see that God is with us *all of the time*.
Through *all* moments. ...And that's why we celebrate.

These Advent minutes of anticipation---are special and set apart from the rest,
so that we can remember how holy *every* moment is, in our *life* with God,
outside of these weeks of December.

It's a time of remembering that as we move from one hour to the next,
from the nows into the laters,
We're called to live and breathe in the word of God,
and fulfill the promise of God, through all of the *minutes* between.

It's a time of remembering that we've accepted an *invitation*
to walk in the light of God, each and every day of our lives.

So through this season of waiting, while we wait in the long lines,
and wait for packages to be delivered, and wait for flights to land...

let's remember and celebrate the fact that
what we wait for in Christ, is already within us.

That beautiful peace of God has swept through us
and filled us up, as a result of his life,

And it's up to us, each minute after, to let it pour from inside of us, and out into the world

For the sake of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Of God's promise.

...And for the sake of each other.

So that we might soon see the day Isaiah spoke of so long ago.

That day when God's glory will overwhelm the world.

And the love that God shared with us through the love of Christ can be felt, and seen,
and heard, through each moment, in each place, by all.

Amen.