

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Peter 3:8-15a

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

“Lost in Wonder”

The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote to an aspiring young poet “be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.” Then, Rilke suggests, “you will live into the answers.”¹ I’ve found this Advent season that I need to heed Rilke’s advice. I need to be patient in regards to my limited understanding of God promise of peace and I need to live into the answers God has already provided.

This Advent I’ve been lost in WONDER over the depths of the mysteries of God and the gift of faith I’ve been given. I know and believe in a loving God who is for and with us. I wonder over the mystery of all that God is and has done! God became human that we gentiles may know God, but is holy, set apart, and mystery as well. I wonder and stand in awe that faith leads to a peace that surpasses all understanding and reason!

At the same time, I’ve always known that knowing God’s promises and my study of the scriptures in light of them open my heart and mind to more questions. Wondering about God

through questioning is a way of faith. Now the scriptures share with us that God desires peace, shalom, not just for the individual, but also for the community and the world. Knowing God's peace cannot remain a follower of Christ's individual claim. For Christians knowing the peace of Christ implies working for peace with our relationships and crying out for peace in the world.

This Advent I've been struck by the news on TV and in the paper. There are those for whom any measure of peace, individual or communal, is truly non-existent. Within God's beloved creation some are starving, freezing to death, dying because of wars and violence against neighbor, sold to be slaves, and others are trapped in mental torment. I am LOST in wonder over the absence of peace for millions of people 2000 years after Jesus' birth. When will the Prince of Peace come again to us and to the world? Isn't it time yet, for the world is suffering. And we know many of our immediate neighbors are suffering too. Come again Emmanuel and set us free.

We are a people lost in WONDER and LOST in wonder!

Wondering, standing in awe of God, and being lost; could these two be a pair? They were for Mary as she was being told she was to be the mother of God. Lost in wonder she both questioned and also accepted God's word for her. Jesus did the same in the garden of Gethsemane. He called out to God with questions, yet accepted God's will for his life. Like a pair of mittens or socks which are useless when separated, questioning and crying out for God's promises to be fulfilled and absolute wonder over what God has already done go together.

If we only stand in awe of God in wonder and refuse to engage in God's active transformation of the world, we ignore pain and suffering shirking our call to go where Jesus did. If we are always LOST in wonder, wandering aimlessly, complaining wanting everything explained, we become people who point but do not follow. Pointers usually have limited capacity to engage in the movement of God's mercy and peace for others in self-giving ways. The author of Second Peter wrote that we are to "wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God." Our wonder and belief in God should collide with our understanding that things are askew in the world—and God doesn't like it this way.

To a people who are lost in WONDER and LOST in wonder our scripture passages claim that we must become active seekers of peace. Our wonder over God's peace in our lives transforms us into agents of peace able to share and spread peace. When a quick scan of the newspaper's world section, or the chaos of our own lives, leads us to courageously declare that God's way of peace will come and we will be active participants in that peace, our questions and lost-ness are put in the context of God's will.

The author of Second Peter calls us to be seekers of peace "that you may be found in peace" by Jesus. Mark's gospel points out this truth recalling the call of the prophets of the Old Testament "prepare the way" for God is coming. Like John the Baptist may not feel worthy enough to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals, but Jesus called us anyways. He called you and me here to SHARE, the peace we know in God with others.

Although we can know peace of Christ here and now we need God to come and fulfill God's promise of a peaceful reign. God has promised a time when "righteousness and peace will kiss"

and God will bring final comfort to God's people. In the meantime, WE ARE IN NEED of God's patience which is our mercy and salvation as Second Peter says. Our call is to emulate good news of the Peace we know through Jesus our Christ, to make the way straight! As we wait for God to fulfill the promise of peace, remember to "be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves." With God's help we can live into the answers.

May our wonder and lost-ness push and pull on one another, thereby shaping us into active participants in God's good news of peace. Amen.

¹ William Sloan Coffin, Letters to a Young Doubter (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2005) Preface.