

“At the Right Time”

4th Wednesday in Advent

Micah 5: 2-5a

December 16, 2009

As we conclude this Advent season the theme has been transformation, which is what the word salvation literally means in the Bible. To be saved is to be transformed. The readings depict the process of this transformation, described in the life of Israel but also lived out in and through each of us. As we wait for the full consummation of the church and all believers we live out our own advent, a time to prepare and to anticipate the transformation brought by God.

The first week addressed preparing the way for the coming of the Lord who will purify and refine God's people. The second week addressed a time when joy is prophesied, a joy that comes from judgment that led to repentance and now sees salvation at hand. And now we come to tonight, a theme that addresses a future shepherd-king who will come and restore, as well as bring peace.

I was told once that *God may seem slow but God is never late*. What that means is that we often look to God to answer prayers, make changes, or reveal His will but all according to our time frame. We want it done so we feel better, or we can end the conflict, etc. But God works on God's time. And when God answers prayer, affects change, makes His presence known it is always at the right time, even though it may appear to be slow in coming.

Our lesson takes place at a time in Israel in which the northern tribes have been exiled by Assyria and the southern tribes (Judah) are being threatened with the same. It is a time when God asks Micah to proclaim a message. First part that Jerusalem will fall and Israel will be destroyed. Of course no one wanted to hear such a dire message. The 2nd half was that from a small, insignificant town as Bethlehem, the next great leader, the one who will bring peace would come forth. From an insignificant town, from a place that has no prestige or honor the savior of Israel, even of the world, would arise.

In Israel's history we read of moments like this. Take for instance Jacob, Joseph, David himself—these are the younger brothers, the ones not supposed to be chosen. In fact, biblical law commands that the older brother gets the birthright, no matter the feelings of the father. And yet, it happens again and again. The youngest is chosen. Jacob gets the birthright and the blessing. Joseph is exalted over his brothers. David is overlooked until all of his brothers have been paraded before Samuel. Then, finally, he is called in from the pastures surrounding Bethlehem to stand before the prophet and be anointed king.

It is not the way of the world, this exaltation of the lowliest. But it is the way God works, over and over and over again. It is an insignificant village. A child born to a young unmarried girl, and that girl's song, heard today: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). And the one who comes from that little village and that young girl becomes the one Micah proclaims as "the one of peace" (5:5). It is a proclamation we will soon hear echoed from the pastures surrounding Bethlehem. And this way of God seems to always happen at just the right time.

So why then, why at that time in Israel's history would God send Jesus? Why wouldn't God send the Messiah hundreds of years earlier to redeem His people? *God may seem slow but God is never late!*

This was a time in which the world was at peace, at least the world that had become dominated by Rome. In fact world history shows us that there has not been a time before or since in which there has been such peace.

Also, the roads Rome built to conquer the world became the very roads to send the message out telling about Jesus. The world spoke one language so all would be able to hear and understand this message. And finally, as far as the world was at that time it was relatively safe to travel through out the Roman Empire. This meant that when Paul or the disciples, or others called to spread the good news about Jesus this was a perfect time, it was the right time, and it was God's time.

God may seem slow but God is never late!

Just as the time when Jesus came was the right time for all of humanity, so too as God breaks into our lives, God turns our hearts, and we find ourselves open to the movement and inclination of God. It is always done at the right time. And not only at the right time but also in a way we would never expect. Just when it appears that our enemy seems to rule, when all the circumstances were just right, Jesus comes and affects a change, transforming each of us, bringing to us life and salvation.

Maybe you have been struggling with certain issues, perhaps the past few months have been difficult, lacking in any sign of God's presence? If history tells us anything it tells us that Jesus always affects our lives in a positive way and always just at the right time. Let me be clear on this.

God has always been present in our world's history and in the history and lives of those called to be his people. But in life, as we all know, we make choices, we react, and at times show a stubborn heart and we fight that presence. Because of free will the turning of our heart, the changing of our attitude, the process that will open us to receive God's help can take time. It can feel as if God is moving too slow. I know. I have felt that way too. Having said that, when change does occur, when we have been open to God, it is often that in those circumstances God saves our hide, and always at the right time.

Micah writing to Israel reminds them that at the right time a savior will lead them and their lives will be transformed. In the same way, with each of us, God too is working in our lives, affecting a change, and transforming our lives. The effect of all that God is doing will be seen; we will be able to point to it, but only at the right time.

God may seem slow but God is never late!

AMEN