

Justice Liturgy

December 17, 2017

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artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

So as I said Artisan's Social Justice Team has devised a beautiful liturgy for us today and they're going to be leading us throughout the service. I'd like to invite Vera to come up and kick us off with the call to worship and to ask you to stand together if you're able during this moment in our service.

[Voice of Vera]

Call to Worship:

In the midst of a world where people hunger and thirst . . .
come worship a God who feeds the hungry.
In the midst of a world where people are abused and oppressed . . .
come worship a God who calls for compassion and justice.
In the midst of a world filled with wars and rumor of war . . .
come worship a God who desires peace for the world.
In the midst of a world of confusion and isolation . . .
come worship a God who gives life meaning.
Come worship a God whose grace and love know no end.

[Voice of Tracey]

Confession:

Eternal God, our redeemer,
we confess that we have tried to hide from you,
for we have done wrong.
We have lived for ourselves
and apart from you.
We have turned from our neighbors
and refused to bear the burdens of others.
We have ignored the pain of the world
and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.
In your great mercy, forgive our sins

and free us from selfishness,
that we may choose your will
and obey your commandments;
through Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

[Voice of Autumn]

Now we continue with the Congregational or community prayer. And we're going to have a specific focus on things in our world that for you, you would say have broken your heart. Things that you've seen locally, nationally, internationally, that for you in this season and this time of year you would say are weighing on you, in the you would want to invite community prayer. And and in that same way it is time to also pray for things that we have seen that have been beautiful works of humanity and the Holy Spirit. Locally, nationally, and internationally. This is a time of the year that we practice, through Advent, living into this waiting. Living into waiting for a time where we will be fulfilled. And we know as Christians that until we are with Christ and until Christ returns we will never experience - this world will never experience - fulfillment. And so this Advent time is a way that we actually get to practice a type of vigilance in waiting. Paying attention to both joy and sorrow. And paying attention in this way - I think it allows us to connect to the sorrow that we see everywhere, joy that we see everywhere. And so, my why don't we spend some time together praying as a community for these things - justice and injustice that you have seen, that you find weighing on you and things that you find you're celebrating.

- For all of the generosity of giving for NEAD <http://neadrochester.org/>. We had eight extra gifts and those gifts were brought to Sojourner house <http://www.sojournerhouse.org/> There were eight children there that needed gifts and were able we were able to give to them. So for both generosity and providence we give thanks to the Lord.
- For the destruction of Hurricane Maria. For the continued after effects of people's living conditions and for their health we pray to the Lord.
- For the ban of words that the C.D.C. and other National Organizations cannot use and government organizations that will actually result in marginalizing certain groups of people. And for the fear and pain that induces we pray to the Lord.
- For simplicity and beauty and the innocence of children in a time that is both chaotic and crazy. As we work hard to slow down and celebrate - for simple joys of nature and snow we give thanks to the Lord.

- For people all and our community who are (especially during this season) are lacking basic resources, community, warmth, food and people to surround them and celebrate with we pray to the Lord.
- For the Rohingya people in Myanmar and Bangladesh. For people that are being forced out of their countries, for refugees that are being tortured and excluded we pray to the Lord.
- For children in our community who don't have basic needs met. Who may be hungry whose clothes are dirty or may not be being taken care of. And also for our understanding of ways to help in ways that don't hurt, how to tell our children, and practice offering both effective and helping hands for those children and families we pray to the Lord.

Know that if you have for other prayers or prayers that are unsaid and silent now there are cards on the back of your chair that you can fill out. We have a prayer team that will read those, so put them in the box in the back of the room. They will be praying about those and there's a member of the prayer team at the back of the room that can also pray with you for things that you celebrate and that weigh on your heart.

[Voice of Melody]

Last week's advent sermon was about being called to be people of peace. How do we do that? I think there are lots of answers to that question, but one I'd like to invite you to consider is through the paradox of lament and hope. Sometimes it can seem that the way to pursue peace is to ignore or avoid all the hard stuff happening in our lives and in our world. Yet, I think Scripture gives us tools to lean into the suffering of our world, to engage with it, as a way of pursuing peace. Today's sermon will be a liturgy on the themes of social justice in this week's lectionary readings. And our anchoring point will be integrating lament and hope as pathways to pursuing peace.

Consider this question posed by Christena Cleveland, a social psychologist and public theologian:

"What would it look like for us to intentionally turn toward the very pain that we so often avoid, intentionally seeking out evidence that God is present, active, and bringing hope? Because in the end we must ask ourselves: How can we seek hope and God in the midst of devastating systemic pain if our whole lives are about escaping the reality of such pain? Turning our attention toward systemic pain is not something we typically associate with spiritual nourishment and liberation, but what if it is? What if we can't truly experience the hope of the Divine until we are able to experience the Divine in the most hopeless situations?"

Christina Cleveland reminds us that Advent is a good time to ponder these questions because, as she says,

“Advent isn’t about our best world, it’s about our worst world. Advent is an invitation to plunge into the deep, dark waters of our worst world, knowing that when we re-surface for air we will encounter the hopeful, hovering Spirit of God. “Advent, meaning “the coming,” is a time when we wait expectantly. Like Mary, we celebrate the coming of the Christ child, what God has already done. And we wait in expectation of...what God will yet do. But this waiting is not a passive waiting. It is an active waiting. As an expectant mother knows, this waiting also involves preparation, exercise, nutrition, care, prayer, work; and birth involves pain, blood, tears, joy, release, community. It is called labor for a reason. Likewise, we are in a world pregnant with hope, and we live in the expectation of the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. As we wait, we also work, cry, pray, ache; we are the midwives of another world... We do the Light a disservice when we underestimate the darkness. Jesus entered a world plagued not only by the darkness of individual pain and sin, but also by the darkness of systemic oppression. Jesus’ people, the Hebrews, were a subjugated people living as exiles in their own land; among other things, they were silenced and targets of brutality by the empire. For many, the darkness of long-standing oppression had extinguished any hope for liberation. It was into this “worst world” that the Light-in-which-We-See-Light was born, liberating the people from the terror of darkness. So it is in the midst of our worst world that we, too, can most clearly see the Light, for light shines more brightly against a backdrop of true darkness. For when we dive into the depths of our worst world, we reach a critical point at which our [surface celebrations or efforts to conjure up hope on our own] no longer satiate our longing for hope – and we are liberated by this realization. Indeed, the light of true hope is found in the midst of darkness.”

I think a way to dive into the depths of our worst world and anchor our hope in God is to lament the suffering and pain in the world. To see it, to acknowledge it, to recognize our role in it and to repent of the ways that we contribute to the suffering and oppression of others. To invite God to change our hearts, to change our systems, to show us how we can be the hands and feet of God in our communities, in our nation, in our world. To find hope in that possibility, in that promise. And that, I think, is one way we can pursue peace. The writer Sarah Bessey writes

“I believe in creating peace, in disrupting for peace, in the truth that peace isn’t always polite and it certainly isn’t status quo, and it isn’t always cozy, and it will make people uncomfortable because they’re so used to benefiting from the lack of it...I believe peace is hard fought in the corners of our own hearts before it’s demonstrated and enacted. I believe in a peaceful imagination that dares toward joy and hope...Peace is what God announced at the birth of God-self among us: Peace, Peace on Earth!

We will now read and reflect on the lectionary passages for today as we continue to lament the pain and suffering in our world together, continue to find hope in God’s promises and presence and continue to pursue peace.

[Voice of Mary]

Reading of 1st Lectionary passage Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

61:1 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

61:2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

61:3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

61:4 They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

61:8 For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

61:9 Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

61:11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Art Reflection: Now we are going to now do a short reflection and meditation on an image. This is something that we've done sometimes here at Artisan. This is a painting by Oswaldo Guayasamin and it's called Tenderness.



(Image Description: Image is of a rectangular painting in expressionist style on a dark blue background. Two people with black hair, brown eyes and yellow-gold skin nearly fill the frame. They are not wearing clothes. The larger figure has eyes closed and is embracing the smaller figure in front of them with both arms. The smaller figure looks directly ahead with eyes open.)

So first I would like you to briefly just look at the image and create a mental description of the artwork. Know what you see. Look for recognizable forms and images. What types of wind scholars shapes and textures do you see?

Now let's explore the visual structure and artist choices a little more deeply. How did the artist arrange the elements? What colors stand out to you? Why do you think that might be what captures your attention? You could notice how your eyes move around the image and where you stop for longer periods of time. Where do you return to more frequently?

Now as we go a little further we'll try to start making meaning out of the image. What story do you think the artist might be telling? What details help add to that meaning? Does the artwork express a mood or emotion? Does anything in this piece of art remind you of a personal experience? How does this artwork relate to what we have read and what's been said today? Do you see lament? Hope? Suffering? Love? All of the above?

Finally we will reflect and pray. Based on your observations and interpretations what stands out to you most? Why do you think this artist created this work? What are you left feeling and thinking? So as you take a moment to pray or reflect on these questions, thoughts, feelings, and anything that may have come up for you, I'll close with a prayer as you continue to look at the image and sit with your feelings and thoughts.

Oh God open our eyes that we may see the needs of others. Open our ears that we may hear their cries. Open our hearts that we may feel their anguish and their joy. Let us not be afraid to defend the oppressed, the poor, or the powerless because of the anger and might of the powerful. Show us where love and hope and faith are needed and use us to bring them in. Use us to bring them to those places. Open our ears and eyes and hearts and lives that we may, in these coming days, be able to do the work of justice and peace for you.

[Voice of Tracey]

Reading of 2nd Lectionary passage Psalm 126

126:1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

126:2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

126:3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

126:4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

126:5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

126:6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

And for our part of the lament that I'm going to share we took part of the book of laments that our greenhouses collectively created. If you want to read some of that there are copies out in the foyer after service. Last spring, I think, as a project the greenhouses came together and asked each person if they wanted to share a line of lament. Then they were collaboratively put together and each greenhouse created their own prayer. So this was just one of them.

Please hear me, O God!

*I want to know that you are listening.
I want to know that you have not abandoned us.*

*We give power to capital and country.
We turn away from the vulnerable among us.
We are afraid.*

*Yet I feel, I know, that though every age has yelled these words at you,
There are always those who say "God is good."
Especially those who, with grey hair and tottering step, say
"God has been good to me."
So....I will hang on.*

*Wake us up from this sleep of neglect.
Turn our hearts from the cold iciness of anger and hatred.
Bring humility, sweet humility, to the proud and arrogant.*

*In our humility, in our love, with our eyes open to those around us,
Lift us like resurrected bones,
Cover us in flesh again as Ezekiel prophesied; let us be human,
Let us be whole.*

Let kindnesses roll from our tongues and justice from our hands.

*In you, God, can I breathe deeply.
My heart is light when I rest in you.*

[Voice of Melody]

Reading of 3rd Lectionary Passage 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

5:16 Rejoice always,

5:17 pray without ceasing,

5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.

5:20 Do not despise the words of prophets,

5:21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good;

5:22 abstain from every form of evil.

5:23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

So to reflect on that I am going to read some of the names of God found both in Scripture and in writings of Christians over the centuries as a way to remind ourselves to anchor our hope in a God who cares for issues of justice and peace. If you feel comfortable you can close your eyes as I read these names.

God who brought your people out of slavery and exile
Prince of Peace
Light in a dark world
One who gives voice to the voiceless
Hope of all generations
God of justice
God of just love
God of the poor and excluded
Defender of widows and orphans
Provider
One who hears your people's cries
God of the oppressed
God who desires the flourishing of all
Freeing God
Liberator
Deliverer
Rescuing God
Sustainer
Potter

Creator
Our Maker
Challenging God
One who blesses and disturbs us
God of love and anger
Suffering God
Passionate God
God who raises up the humble and humbles the proud
God who feeds the hungry but sends the rich away empty
God who brings freedom for the captive, justice for the oppressed
God who blesses the persecuted

[Voice of David]

Reading of 4th Lectionary Passage John 1:6-8, 19-28

1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

1:7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

1:8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

1:19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

1:20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

1:21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

1:23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

1:24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

1:25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

1:26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know,

1:27 *the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."*

1:28 *This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.*

Now I'm going to read a prayer of lament followed by a prayer of petition.

Lament:

*We lament for a world that is not yet made right,
We lament all the darkness as we wait for the light.
Today we grieve hate, hunger, and apathy. We grieve racism, misogyny and the
oppression of indigenous peoples.
Today we grieve ISIS, political polarization, and human trafficking. We grieve mental
illness stigma, immigration injustice, and violence.
Today we grieve the school-to-prison pipeline, Spiritual abuse, and economic
inequality. We grieve segregation, poverty, and police brutality.
Today we grieve global oppression of women, marginalization, and darkness. We
grieve loneliness, the loss caused by cancer, and the lies told by depression.
Today we grieve the victims of hate and fear and greed. We grieve the hurtful
systems that go unquestioned and those who follow those systems.
Today we grieve the evil and ignorance in our own hearts. We grieve the ways we
have wounded ourselves, the earth, and the people around us.
We lament for a world that is not yet made right.
We lament all the darkness as we wait for the light.*

Petition:

*Now come, Lord Jesus, come.
Bring hope, bring healing.
Bring unity, bring peace.
Bring life, bring mercy.
Bring understanding, bring relief.
Bring reconciliation, bring empowerment.
Bring sustainability, bring help.
Bring movement, bring new life.
Bring spirit, bring truth.
Bring redemption, bring laughter.
Bring what we've been waiting for, bring light.
Come as you have. Come again.*

Invitation to communion: Our communion table is an open table. You may dip the bread in the wine or the juice, whatever is best for you and your family. If you have kids in kids' programming, you may get them now or right after you take communion. Let's pray for our communion.

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table, we cannot forget the rawness of the

earth. We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry. Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.

Lord, put our fullness at the service of the poor.

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.

Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty.

We cannot hear your words of peace and forget the world at war or, if not at war, then preparing for it.

Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs and the lust for power into a desire for peace.

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions. We are one in spirit, but not in fact. History and hurt still dismember us.

Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com