

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Second Sunday After Christmas, Year B; 3 January 2021
St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 202101030947)

New Year, New Hopes

In nomine...

I. New Year

Happy New Year! ¡Prospero año nuevo!

Today is the tenth day of Christmas: we continue to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord during this time. Even as our neighbors move on and our children go back to school, we continue to ponder the mystery of divinity born incarnate, the wonder of God's sacrificial love for us.

For many people around the world, 2020 may have been the worst year on record. It was filled with death, want, the loss of livelihoods, and separation from the people, places, and events that give our lives meaning. Our medical personnel and front-line workers have witnessed terrible things and suffered terrible traumas, the kinds of injuries that can't be fixed with a bandage or an antibiotic, injuries to their hearts and souls.

So it is with relief that many of us are glad to see the end of 2020 and to enter 2021. We hope this new year brings something different. *That* is the gift of the New Year's celebration. We represent the new year as a baby: fresh and innocent and yet unspoiled by the evils we encountered in the year past. Sometimes we make resolutions, statements of aspiration and commitment about how *we* are going to be new and different and better in the new year. Our hope is to encounter less evil and more goodness, more peace, more contentment, in the year to come.

II. Prophecy Unsettles

It may be that some of us have been spared the worst of what 2020 had to offer, seeing our incomes basically uninterrupted and not burying anyone in our immediate families. But the prophet Jeremiah in our first reading writes in solidarity with those who were deported by faceless governments, ripped from their homes, their families, and their livelihoods for political reasons. Our Gospel reading from Matthew is concerned with the suffering of the families of Bethlehem and its surrounding district whose male babies two years old and younger were slaughtered by a king who felt threatened, and the family of Jesus himself who fled to another continent in search of political asylum among a people who looked and spoke and worshiped differently than they did.

So prophecy speaks words of judgement, yes, but words of judgement against the evil in the world that hurts people, hurts our neighbors, hurts us. Words of judgement about all the things that hurt us in 2020. Prophetic words are words of God's discontent, God's determination not to put up with anything that is hurting God's people, but to bring change and alteration to the world. To renew the world like a baby: pure and fresh and innocent. Prophetic words are a warning: don't get too comfortable with the way things are. If people are still hurting, then change is needed, and God is even now doing the work of bringing about that change.

If you're looking for something different in 2021, then you're not alone. That is the hope offered to us is Jeremiah's prophecy.

III. Prophecy as Hopeful Vision

There is a rhythm to the world we live in. Human flourishing and freedom creates space for human evil and suffering. But to believe in God is to believe we know how it all ends. You can hear Jeremiah's joyful exuberance:

*Shout with joy for Jacob!
Hail the chief of nations!
Proclaim! Praise! Shout,
"Yahweh has saved his people,
the remnant of Israel!"*

Then Jeremiah quotes God as saying, “Watch this! See what I’m about to do! And God speaks of God’s powerful liberation of people scattered over the whole earth, of God’s special care for those who are weak or vulnerable, elderly or young. God is making great promises that God will not hold back God’s goodness.

IV. God’s Promises

These are the promises of God for God’s people. This is the promise of life in God’s Kingdom. It’s more than just a new year with incremental improvements. It’s more than a vaccine or a “return to normal.” God is bringing about lavish gifts of justice, well-being, and safety. God is bringing wholeness and joy. This is the reality we gather as church to proclaim, to remind ourselves of, to hold onto.

2021 is going to have its own troubles. This pandemic is not over yet. Division in our country, wars around the world, and the exploitation of peoples by one another is far from ended. But 2021, just like 2020, is the year of our Lord, a year in which God reigns. 2021 is a year for you and I to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. We acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our lives in the ways we give our attention and spend our time. In doing so we will discern more clearly the contours of God’s Kingdom and participate in the great work of bringing that kingdom about, “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Today God has given us the gift of a new life in Christ. Today is the day for us to begin anew by the divine power of God’s love for us.

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