

January 17, 2021

Sermon Title: "God's Vision for the Land"

Biblical Passage: Isaiah 40:3-5

Passage Background and Summary

A voice cries out:

**"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

**4 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.**

**5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

In the passage for today, the people are in a period in which all seems lost. The sacred shrines and institutions that gave them a sense of personhood seem broken and beyond repair. They are in a dark place, and God is telling the prophet to speak comfort to God's people and remind them that God is still God and will make a way out of no way. Amid their darkness, God is telling them of the glory that is to come.

Sermon Points

We are currently in a time similar to that of the people of God in Isaiah. We are in a land made strange by pandemic, economic turndown, political speech and rhetoric, and more. In some ways, it seems that we have reached new lows as evidenced by the recent attack on the Capitol stirred up by demagogues. Yet, amid this time of exile and spiritual exhaustion, God is still speaking and wants to offer us a word of hope today. God has a vision for the land.

In God's Vision for the Land:

- **Valleys Are Exalted, Mountains Made Low (Equity)**

In God's vision of the land, there is a reversal of things. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The playing field is leveled so that we can get some equity in the land. For some who are accustomed to privilege, equity feels like oppression as we see in this moment today. There are demagogues stirring up the worst of stereotypes, and division is blurring our vision. Dr. King's last big push was working towards fairness and equity with the Poor People's Campaign. As he was planning that, he was called to Memphis to march with sanitation workers following the deaths of two Black sanitation workers who were crushed by their trucks. Time and time again, poor people, black people and brown

people and struggling people are crushed by systems that don't care about us. Still, in God's economy, valleys are exalted, and hills and mountains are made low so that the workers may share in some of the prosperity that they are providing. The Bible says woe to those who crush the poor.

- **Crooked Places Are Made Straight (Integrity)**

We live in a time where if you don't like the facts, you can create alternative facts. If you don't like the science, you can exchange it for fiction and conspiracy theories. We see time and time again that Bryan Stevenson is right in saying that you are better off being rich and guilty than poor and innocent. We see it with Eric Garner and George Floyd as well as Ahmaud Arbery who committed the crime of running while black and Breonna Taylor of sleeping while black. The biggest drug pushers are the drug companies, but nothing happens to them because those who make the laws are owned by them. Pastor Warnock says he'll keep speaking truth to power because he answers to a higher authority. We have to stand up until the crooked places are made straight.

- **Rough Places Are Made Smooth (Possibility)**

God didn't say it wouldn't get dark but promised that the light would shine in the darkness. Sometimes for Martin Luther King Jr. Day we sing "We Shall Overcome" but why? We can look back and see the ways God has made rough places smooth and how far God has already brought us. Segregated schools and hand-me-down books produced first place leaders. HBCUs, for so long underfunded, over performed and produced a VP named Kamala, a mayor named Keisha, a leader and visionary named Stacey, and a Senator named Raphael. Yes, we have a long way to go but if you look back over the years, God has always made a way out of no way. In God's vision for the people there is possibility. There's possibility in this moment of pain. God is working it all out and the question is - are we on the side of God?

- **All Flesh Shall See It Together (Inclusivity)**

While this text was previously read and interpreted as meaning that God's glory is so grand that when it appears, all flesh shall see it together, Pastor Warnock now sees it as the prophet telling us how to see it. God's glory is so great and so grand that it takes all flesh to be able to see it together. That's why we have to resist hate and prejudice and bigotry and violence. God is opening the door so that we may see what God is up to because division blurs our vision. When Pastor Warnock gets weary, he looks up and sees birds flying by. Geese fly in a "V" formation. It's the division of labor in motion, and the one out front is working the hardest. Nevertheless, when the one out front gets tired, he moves back into the formation and she moves up and takes his place. Geese do that without a war or a riot or an insurrection. Geese do that without trying to shut the whole government down or without a church schism. We must work

together, pray together, stay together so that we may see the glory of God and arrive where God is trying to take us.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe a time during this pandemic in which you have felt hopeless.
2. What does equity look like in your field? What does equity look like in the world?
3. How do we respond to misinformation during this time and stand up until the crooked places are made straight?
4. What have you overcome in your life thus far? When has God showed up for you?
5. What are ways in which you can work with others to bring about change?
6. What can we do to work towards God's vision as it relates to equity, integrity, possibility, and inclusivity?