

Stir up your power, O Lord.

It's been nearly four months since I've been in Austin and I am very fond of it thus far and of my apartment here. My apartment is warm (now, cool in August) and cozy and I have found over these months I've grown quite accustomed to the voice that I'll often hear outside my window: Wait, wait, wait to cross Burnet. I hear it at all hours of the day and night and it seems as though somehow that should sink in but I find, that each time I drive somewhere this traffic light—which so kindly keeps pedestrians safe—becomes a source of tension as I wait sometimes upwards of four minutes for that same dear light to change. Maybe some of you know this feeling—when you want to be on the other side of the road, driving on towards your destination but there you are, waiting at the light. So, sometimes I sit there, waiting—with a little huff, a little angst about what this does to the environment—a sighing—as though, convinced *that* will make this stoplight change faster.

Today, in our lesson we hear a prophecy of what the coming of the Messiah will be like: Isaiah says, “Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; the ransomed of the Lord shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

The sighing here goes far beyond a slow traffic light to sighing for pieces of the kingdom of heaven that have not yet come.

Isaiah's words are the fulfillment we wait for, signs of the Kingdom of heaven.

his prophecy for all God's people that they may be covered with joy, filled with gladness and that sorrow and sighing are stripped away. This is a sign of the Kingdom of heaven. It's a lovely idea for this prophet to write about—joy and gladness for all, no more sorrow and sighing—and in our Gospel we are told actually it is Jesus Christ who comes to fulfill this prophecy. Jesus Christ, who's birth we prepare for now is the one who will put joy upon our heads, who will help us to obtain joy and gladness and in whom sorrow and sighing will flee away.

But, I find, here I am, two weeks until Christmas, at the beginning of the third week of Advent and there is still much sighing, not all have joy and gladness. And this is Advent—we prepare for Christ who fulfills these prophecies and acknowledge there is more we wait for.

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Advent in Latin means arrival. And in Advent, we anticipate this arrival and we practice waiting. We acknowledge that God entered our world 2000 years ago in Jesus the Christ and we acknowledge that we wait for when the Christ will come into our world again. Christ is somehow present with us, has come to us and yet we also wait. And waiting is something we can cultivate and appropriate positively, not with so much sighing, in our life.

And I'm not gifted at waiting. I don't like to wait in lines in general and was taught from a younger age not to wait at traffic lights--—I don't drive through them—but to find all possible routes to get around it.

But in Advent we remember that there is a kind of waiting that is a precious gift to us, a vehicle of hope and, is not passive but rather a catalyst to loving action. When we wait with hope and with joy-- An everlasting joy that comes from faith and confidence in Christ—when we wait with hope for what the kingdom really is like *we bring that reality closer to us and thus closer to the world we are in.*

And bit by bit we practice this. In this season of preparation and expectancy we can allow ourselves to try and understand more what God's kingdom of heaven is truly like—not our kingdom of heaven, not someone else's kingdom of heaven—but what, truly and really the kingdom of Heaven is like. I suspect that at this stop light it is just in my kingdom that I don't have to wait, but I suspect in God's it is that I wait with a car full of people—those who are different than me building relationship with those who I already love dearly.

And we ask Christ to help us to see God's Kingdom...and this is not new to our church or tradition.

There is a practice of prayer called contemplation—unlike meditation when you look more inwards—contemplation is more of a looking upon or a gazing. We can, for example, contemplate what the nativity is like, we can contemplate Mary's news that she will bear the Christ child—we can also contemplate our anger at a co-worker, or how badly we wished we were on the other side of a stoplight. And we can contemplate what the kingdom of Heaven is like. When we try to see more what it looks like when everlasting joy is upon our heads, all shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. It is something magnificent.

And God may never show us the full picture but in contemplation we become closer to that which we look upon. And while, we've got some lovely new prayer stools in the upstairs reflection room, 2nd floor of the education building, available for your use at any time for prayer, mediation or contemplation--we can contemplate who Christ is and what it means for us that we prepare to celebrate his entering our world, in any amount of time or dose or setting. In the few moments between meetings, in the few minutes before going to sleep or getting out of bed in the morning, as we drive from one place to another or wait for a light to turn. To look upon Christ and the Kingdom of heaven is something that Advent is a wonderful season for. And, when we look upon, try to understand more Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven, what the Holy Spirit is saying to us-- we draw nearer to them. It shows us when sighing is unnecessary and when it shows us an injustice that must be changed. The prophets saw the discord between what is now and God's kingdom and their visions bring us closer to a day of everlasting joy or when sorrow and sighing flee away. When we imagine or see more what the kingdom of heaven is really like, what it is Christ brings to fulfillment we help that reality come closer, we bring a taste of it into our own life, and subsequently, the life of those around us.

In Advent, we practice the hope of waiting. It is a time we can surrender our need to have all things now, surrender the habit or attitude of grumbling or sighing and instead look to the hope we

have in Christ—the hope we have in one who possesses all the joy we need, is made of endless love and has all the joy and love that those we love or have loved need, too.

I invite you, as we pray with and encounter Christ in this service, gathered together here as Christ's body and in a few minutes throughout this week, perhaps in a time you would usually sigh-- to think about who Christ is and what the Kingdom of heaven is. To believe in it more and then see how God leads you to bring that into reality.

From our collect today:

Stir up *your* power, O Lord-- and may we look with hope and then bring into reality more-- the day when, "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; all shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."