

November 27, 2022 - Advent 1A - Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 122, Rom 13:11-14, Matthew 24:36-44
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"The World As It Is and The World As It Should Be"

At the end of June this past year, I started working in a part-time capacity as an organizer with ISAIAH and Faith in Minnesota - organizations working to build the power of people of faith and conscience for the sake of a multiracial democracy and caring economy. Although I was not looking for more work, when this opportunity showed up I knew in my gut that I couldn't turn it down.

I've had a deep respect for the work of faith-based community organizing for quite some time, but always claimed it wasn't work for me to do. Since I moved back to MN almost 5 years ago and started volunteering with ISAIAH in a clergy capacity, however, I found myself compelled by the perspectives embedded in the work of organizing and the way they invited me deeper into my life of faith. The problems we face because of the way that capitalism and white supremacy have a hold on us are not small - as you

know - and nothing I have yet encountered, aside from organizing, seems to be able to really meet the moment.

One of these perspectives is the organizing tool of naming the *tension* between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

For example, every day we encounter the reality that many of our neighbors are unhoused. Yet, we should live in a world where everyone has the resources they need and most importantly, a warm place to sleep at night - especially this time of year. Based on the teachings of Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation, this *tension* is central to the work of organizing.

Living only in the world as it is can make us feel resigned or powerless to the realities we see around us. It can cause us to believe that there really is no other way, so we might as well make the best of it. Whereas, living only in the world as it should be can cause us to be aloof and irrelevant. Especially in Christian circles, it can lead to an apathy about the tangible struggles here and now

because of the idea that our faithful purpose is to simply escape this world in order to be with God in a perfect afterlife that is yet to come.

In his book, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*, Edward T. Chambers writes, “IAF’s position is that maintaining a good enough tension between the two worlds [the world as it is and the world as it should be] is the hallmark of authentically moral and ethical human living. Embracing this tension every day is our spiritual destiny.”

This year, on the first Sunday in Advent, our assigned scriptures highlight this tension between these two worlds. Isaiah puts forth a vision of the future where swords become plowshares and war is no more. The Psalmist sings of the hope of a peaceful Jerusalem. Paul suggests that the day of the Lord is near. And Matthew tells of Jesus warning his listeners to be ready for nobody knows the day or the hour of the Lord’s coming.

All four of these readings locate their hear-ers in an in-between space. They invite us to keep awake to this world and to the world for which we long. This tension is what Jesus is referring to when he tells the people to be ready. This tension is not simply an organizing perspective, it is a faith perspective. It *is* the practice of waiting we talk about as we enter into this season.

Here at Hope we gather under the Advent theme of “All Earth is Waiting.” Outside of worship, during this season we are invited to enhance our Advent practice through Bible study, Wednesday night worship, a creation care initiative to get more LED light bulbs in our homes, and an organizing project alongside a handful of other Minneapolis congregations called Hope Calls: Advent Action for Climate Justice.

What a gift that we have such a variety of ways to engage our faith during this short 4-week liturgical season. Because the

waiting, in-between space of this season is not a passive space. Waiting is an active place to be. It is a place of preparing, of making room, of shifting our gaze or our orientation. “When these two worlds collide hard enough and often enough,” Chambers writes, “a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited.”

This is why I couldn't quite turn down the opportunity to practice and learn more organizing skills. The summer of 2021 caused me to wake up to the realities of climate change even more concretely as Minnesota experienced the worst drought we'd had in decades. I'd spent a lot of time worrying and fretting about our changing climate, but seeing its effects so close to home at a time in my life when parenting small people has made me even more deeply connected to the vulnerability of human life, has had a profound impact on me. So much so that I decided to leave my former call and focus on my kids for a short time. Life just felt too short, too precarious, too precious not to try something different.

Somewhere along the way, an organizer or a friend or maybe it was even my organizer husband, had made it plain for me that I could choose to feel powerless in the face of this seemingly insurmountable crisis, I could spin my own wheels OR, I could choose to act with agency - channeling my angst and energy into work that might possibly make a difference. I was stuck living only in the world as it is and they pushed me to take seriously my own vision for the world as it should be. These two worlds collided because I was invited to keep one foot in each space, and it lit a fire in my belly.

But you don't have to be an organizer and you don't have to be interested in organizing to engage in this spiritual practice. We are called as faithful people to live faithfully with one foot firmly planted in each world. To straddle that tension everyday. The visions of the prophets, the songs of the psalmist, the struggles and wonderings of the early church - all of which we find in our scriptures today - teach us that we are a part of a long line of

communities that have lived in this tension, in this waiting place.

That it is our call to be here, too. For it is into this tension, into this waiting, that Christ comes.

As you entered the sanctuary for worship today, if you're worshipping in person, you received an "earth" and a pen and some instructions with three questions written on them.

- What are you waiting for personally?
- What are you waiting for in the world?
- What is Earth waiting for?

At some point during our service today you are invited to write your answer to one or two or all three of these questions on your earth. We will collect them as you leave the sanctuary at the end of the service. If you are worshipping via youtube, you can email your responses to a pastor and if you're joining via zoom, we invite you to write your response in the chat. All your responses will be written on an earth and will join the others to adorn our

worship space and surround our practices during this season of waiting.

I am waiting for a world where I can teach my kids to garden without having to water every day all summer long. Where the air quality is always safe for outdoor play. I am waiting for a world where we address our climate crisis as a collective through public transit, investment in low carbon, caregiving jobs, regulations on corporate emissions, and a spiritual overhaul of what we value as a culture. And I think the earth may be waiting for this, too.

What are you waiting for personally?

What are you waiting for in the world?

What is Earth waiting for?

Whatever your answers may be, I pray that you may find yourself firmly planted both in the world as it is and the world as it should be. That this tension, this waiting place, may light the fire in your belly so that we might act on God's promises for us and for all the earth, together. Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

1The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

3Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

5O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Psalm: Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." (Ps. 122:1)

1I was glad when they | said to me,
"Let us go to the house | of the Lord."

2**Now our | feet are standing
within your gates, | O Jerusalem.**

3Jerusalem is built | as a city
that is at unity | with itself;

4**to which the tribes go up, the tribes | of the Lord,
the assembly of Israel, to praise the name | of the Lord. R**

5For there are the | thrones of judgment,
the thrones of the | house of David.

6**Pray for the peace | of Jerusalem:
"May they pros- | per who love you.**

7Peace be with- | in your walls
and quietness with- | in your towers.

8**For the sake of my kindred | and companions,
I pray for | your prosperity.**

9Because of the house of the | Lord our God,
I will seek to | do you good." R

Second Reading: Romans 13:11-14

11Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Gospel: Matthew 24:36-44

[Jesus said to the disciples,] 36"About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 42Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."