

JUST WHAT ARE YOU ANTICIPATING? (Part 2)

ISAIAH 11:1-9; 42:1-7; 61:1-3

Jan Richardson writes, “The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before.... What is possible is not to see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you.... So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon.” Christmas is a season of anticipation. Advent is also a time of anticipation. We get to reflect again on the amazing significance of Jesus’ birth. What does it mean for this world past, present and future? What does it mean for my life personally past, present and future? During Advent this year we’re asking some questions and then looking to the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah to provide answers. Isaiah had a lot to say about the coming of the Messiah – the One we recognize as Jesus – even though he lived some 700 years before Jesus’ birth. All Isaiah could ever do was anticipate, expect and look forward because he preceded Jesus. We learn much from his insights.

The first question was, “Just *who* are you anticipating?” Several statements in Isaiah’s prophecy made it clear that Jesus is God with us, God for us and God in us. Then, two weeks ago, we asked, “Just *what* are you anticipating?” We looked at Isaiah 52 and 53 and saw this incredible picture of a Savior – One who lays down his own life for us and then rises from the dead. Today, I want to expand on that same question, “Just *what* are you anticipating?” and look for answers in other passages of Isaiah. Next week, we’ll conclude by asking and trying to answer the question, “Is your anticipation *big enough*?”

Just *what* are you anticipating? What did Jesus come to do? Let’s read and reflect on three passages in Isaiah. Here’s the first one. The coming Messiah is referred to as the Branch coming up out of the stump of Jesse. What is that about? Jesse was the father of David, Israel’s greatest king. The Lord had promised David that the Messiah would be one of his descendants. David’s royal family was thought of as a great tree, but the tree had been reduced to just a stump by Isaiah’s time – some 300 years after King David’s reign. Only two of Israel’s twelve tribes were still loyal to the royal house of David. But Isaiah says that the story was not going to end there. There was still life in that stump – God’s life waiting God’s time. Out of that good as dead stump would grow a Branch that would produce wonderful fruit.

Now, when Matthew tells us the story of Jesus in the New Testament, he’s very careful to provide a genealogy that documents that Jesus is descended directly from King David. Jesus is the Branch from the stump of Jesse. Jesus fully met all the descriptions of the coming Messiah Isaiah writes about here in v. 2-5. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and, as a result, possessed wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He embodied what it means to fear the Lord – not that He was terrified of God – but, rather,

that He was perfectly in line with God and respected God fully in every area of His own life. Jesus had perfect discernment. Jesus showed compassion to those who were in need. Jesus spoke words of judgment to those who rejected God. Righteousness and faithfulness characterized Jesus.

Now let's move on to our second passage. Another great name that Isaiah gives to the coming Messiah is the Servant of the Lord. This Servant has a special, unique relationship to God Himself. He's filled with the Holy Spirit. His leadership style will be very different than what most earthly leaders display. Instead of being self-serving, He will serve others. Instead of exploiting the weak, He will be compassionate. Instead of excusing injustice, He will establish justice. He has a unique, God-given mission to both Israel and the rest of the world. Now turn with me to Matthew 12:15-21. Verses 18-21 are a direct quote from Isaiah 42:1-4. Very clearly, Matthew believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus was and is *the* Servant of the Lord.

Let's look at one more passage in Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me..." Who is "me"? It's the coming Messiah. What will the coming Messiah do? Again, His ministry is marked by the presence and power of God Himself through the Holy Spirit. The Messiah will have a powerful message for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, and the prisoner. He will proclaim or announce that God has arrived in a new, compelling way – a day that brings both salvation and judgment for the whole world. Look at Luke 4:14-21 with me just now. Jesus considered Himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy here. Again, we recognize how wonderfully Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's words 700 years after they were first written down. And Jesus Himself, in a sense, says in Luke, "Isaiah was talking about Me." So having read those three prophecies, let's ask the question again, "Just *what* are you anticipating?" What was the Messiah going to do? What did Jesus do when He came? What is He still doing? And what should we do as followers of Jesus? First of all ...

ANTICIPATE PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION.

Two weeks ago I spent a whole message the fact that Jesus came to transform your life and mine personally. That's the picture Isaiah paints so powerfully in chapters 52 and 53. Your relationship with God is broken by something the Bible calls sin. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God restores your capacity to have a relationship with Him. All of us have sinned numerous times. The penalty for sin established by a holy and a perfect God is death and eternal separation from Him. But God sent Himself in His Son and died in your place paying the penalty of your sin. Now, you can repent of your sin and receive God's forgiveness. Now, you can put your ultimate trust in Jesus and what He did for you rather than in your own pathetic efforts to measure up to God's standard of perfection. Now, you can receive the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, now, you can experience gradual, personal and spiritual transformation throughout your entire life. In fact, if you're truly a follower of

Jesus that's exactly what will happen to you. Every area of your life now comes under the Lordship of Jesus: how you relate to people, what you value, how you do your job, how you use money, how you express yourself sexually, what comes out of your mouth, your integrity in small things as well as big things.

Can Jesus truly be your Savior without also being your Lord? That was a debate that got some national attention among Christians decades ago. Some said that, yes, a person can receive Jesus as his or her Savior, but not truly or fully understand the implications of Jesus being your "24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year" Boss. Other people said, no, if Jesus isn't Lord of all, He isn't Lord at all. What do you think: Can Jesus be your Savior without also being your Lord? On the one hand, every follower of Jesus here is still learning what Jesus being Lord means on a personal, every day level. We all have pockets of spiritual resistance – some of them we're unconscious of - that God has to reveal to us. On the other hand, if you think that saying a little prayer to receive Jesus as your Savior and getting baptized is all there is to the Christian life, you don't know squat about being a follower of Jesus. He is all about total, absolute personal transformation of every part of your life. He's not done until you bow your knee and confess that He is your Lord in every area of your life and live out that truth. As 2012 winds to a close here, let me ask you: Are you growing spiritually? Is spiritual transformation happening? Are you wiser than you were a year ago? More loving? More outwardly focused? More surrendered to the Lord? Are you more like Jesus than you were a year ago? Jesus was and is all about personal transformation. Are you? Secondly...

ANTICIPATE GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION.

Sometimes we think that only the New Testament tells us that God loves the whole world and that Jesus died for people everywhere. We think the writers of the Old Testament were only addressing the Jewish people. Wrong! Nobody had a bigger picture of God's ultimate plans and purposes than Isaiah, the prophet. In chapter 11 he says, "... for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (Is 11:9 NIV) In chapter 42, Isaiah says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.... He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.... I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." (Is 42:1, 4, 6 NIV) Isaiah knew that the Messiah's mission was bigger than Israel. He was sent not only to be the Savior of Israel, but also to be the Savior of all the nations and the Savior of all creation.

Several years ago, pastor and author, Leith Anderson visited the city of Manila in the Philippines. He was taken to the Manila garbage dump and saw something beyond belief. Tens of thousands of people make their homes on that dump site. They've constructed shacks out of the things other people have thrown away. And they send their children out early every morning to scavenge for food out of

other people's garbage. People are born and grow up there on the garbage dump. They have their families, their children, their garbage to eat, they finish out their lives and die there without ever going anywhere else - even in the city of Manila. It's an astonishing thing. But Americans also live on the garbage dump. They're missionaries - Christians who have chosen to leave their own country and communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it. Isn't that amazing? People leave what we have here to go and live on a garbage dump. Amazing, yes, but not nearly as amazing as the journey from heaven to earth. The Son of God made that journey. He journeyed from heaven to earth on a mission to save the human race.

One of the things I love about our church is our great tradition of supporting missions. But how we got about mission is changing, isn't it? It used to be that we thought of missions as sending people to other parts of the world and supporting them with our prayers and giving. And that's still a very big part of what we want to do and should do. But have you noticed that the nations have come to us? The mission field has come to Northland! Another thing I love about our church is that He has put us right in the midst of a wonderfully multicultural part of this city. Sometimes I go down to the library here on Karl Road to check out some books and I feel like I've just walked into the United Nations! It's wonderful! Many of these precious people come from countries or cultures that have resisted the Gospel for centuries, so God in His sovereignty said, "I'm going to change that! I'm going to put them in a place where they can finally hear about My Son, Jesus. It may take a generation or two to get their attention, but they will finally hear and many will turn to Me." How will He reach them? Through His Church! And we get to be a part of that as a congregation!

Let me ask you, do you really think that's marvelous? Or, are you threatened by the increasing multicultural personality of the community right around this church? Do foreigners make you nervous or resentful? Do you find yourself resisting rather than embracing them? My friend, may I gently remind you that Heaven is the most multicultural place in God's universe. What did John see in the book of Revelation when God gave him a vision of Heaven? "After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, 'Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9-10 NLT) I hope one day that Karl Road Baptist Church will be as multicultural as Heaven itself! Let's celebrate where God has put us geographically and be about His work. I'm challenged by how theologian Justo Gonzalez puts it, "According to the book of Revelation, that is what it is all about. And if that is what it is all about, that had better be what the church is about. If we really believe that this is the future toward which God's history is moving, we had better live out that future, and not out of some other. We must be multicultural, not just so that those from other cultures may feel at home among us, but also so that we may feel at home in God's future."

Unfortunately, you can be born and bred in the United States of America these days and be totally ignorant of who Jesus is and what He's done. You can grow up in our country and never darken the door of a local church. Our culture is becoming increasingly dark spiritually. As a church, we have the privilege of being a light to those who walk in that darkness in our community. And you have the privilege of being God's light to the people you work with, go to school with, and live next door to even if you don't live in Northland. God is all about global transformation. Remember, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (Jo 3:16 NLT) As 2012 winds to a close here, let me ask you: Do you love spiritually lost people? If not, are you asking God to give you a heart for people even if they resist Jesus and raise questions about your faith? God uses His people to bring other people to Himself. Are you available? Jesus was and is all about global transformation. Are you? Thirdly ...

ANTICIPATE COMPREHENSIVE TRANSFORMATION.

About 100 years ago in our country, a big division took place among many churches in America. Those who had a more liberal theological outlook began to minimize and even reject the need for people to make a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Instead, they believed and taught that the Church of Jesus Christ should try to feed the hungry, help the poor and work for peace in the world. Sometimes this was referred to as the "social gospel." Other churches with a conservative or evangelical outlook rejected this reinterpretation of the Bible's message and with good reason. But, sadly, some of them threw the baby out with the bath water. By concentrating only on personal evangelism, they began to believe or teach that it was a waste of time, unnecessary or even wrong to feed the hungry, help the poor and work for peace in the world. It's taken about a century to reject that "either/or" choice and realize that the Bible's approach is "both/and." God cares about people in every way possible: spiritually, economically, physically, emotionally and politically.

God is all about comprehensive transformation. Now, its true that we're never going to eliminate poverty, end hunger or achieve world peace without the direct intervention of Jesus, but that shouldn't discourage us from supporting and working towards those goals right here and now. What God will do in the then and there tells us all we need to know about God's heart and will for the here and now! You cannot read the Old Testament carefully and come away with any other conclusion that God is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, and any and all who are treated unjustly. Both in Isaiah and Jesus' day and time, popular opinion was that poor people were there to be taken advantage of, ripped off and defrauded. God hates the mistreatment of people economically and in every other way! He demands justice and compassion!

That's clear in the three Isaiah passages we've looked at today. What is the Messiah going to do? In Isaiah 11 we read, "... He will not judge by what he

sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.” (Is 11:3-4 NIV) In Isaiah 42, God says about the Servant, “... I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.... he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth... to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” (Is 42:1, 4, 7 NIV) And then in Isaiah 61, we read, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” (Is 61:1 NIV) There’s been a tendency to interpret all those passages in a spiritual sense. “Oh, he’s talking about spiritual poverty, spiritual blindness and spiritual captivity.” I don’t think so! Isaiah is using language and imagery that comes from the year of Jubilee – something that happened every 50 years in Israel when your ancestral land was returned to you if you’d had to sell it and all debts were cancelled. The year of Jubilee and the Mosaic Law as a whole underline the fact that God wants economic justice and fairness for all people. The jubilee year was all about restoring to people the capacity to participate fully in the economic life of the community in which they live.

Not only do we live in a community that is increasingly multicultural, but there are tremendous physical and economic needs all around us. There are significant pockets of poverty in Northland. What can we do as a church to meet those kinds of needs? One response has been our Summer Lunch Program where we provide free lunches to school age children. We’ve enabled lots of kids to attend summer camp, go on mission trips and have other great spiritual experiences. Who knows what the future will bring? Let’s simply open our hearts and our minds to the fact that God wants us to love people comprehensively both as a church and also as individuals. As 2012 winds to a close here, let me ask you: Is God calling you to meet a need in someone else’s life? Are you becoming more compassionate? Do you long for justice and for peace? Jesus was and is all about comprehensive transformation. Are you?

Some years ago there was a Secret Santa who anonymously doled out \$100 bills to the needy every Christmas for the previous 26 years. He finally revealed himself back in 2006. His name is Larry Stewart, aged 58 at that time, a successful businessman from Lee's Summit, Missouri. He decided to go public after it became apparent that a tabloid newspaper was going to reveal his name. Now, he hopes to inspire others to become Secret Santas. So how did this practice begin? In the winter of 1971, Stewart was working as a door-to-door salesman. The company he was working for went out of business, and he quickly ran out of money. Stewart hadn't eaten in two days when he went to Dixie Diner and ordered a breakfast he eventually admitted he couldn't pay for. Ted Horn, the restaurant owner, sympathized with Stewart. He acted as though he found a \$20 bill on the floor underneath Stewart's chair. "Son, you must have dropped this," Horn said. "It was like a fortune to me," Stewart reflected. "I said to myself,

'Thank you, Lord.' Right then, I just made a promise. I said, 'Lord, if you ever put me in a position to help other people, I will do it.'" Over the years, Stewart estimates that he has given away around \$1.3 million. He says he has been amply rewarded in return. "I see the smiles and looks of hopelessness turn to looks of hope in an instant," he says. "After all, isn't that what we're put here on earth for—to help one another?"

I'm not suggesting that you have to give out \$100 bills to needy people. I'm not even suggesting you have to give out money at all. I'm just asking you and myself these questions: What does it mean for you and me to love other people comprehensively? What is Jesus calling you and me to do? If Jesus' ministry is about personal transformation, global transformation and comprehensive transformation, what does that look like for you and for me? Not just at Christmastime but every day of the year.