

December 9, 2018

When There Is No Room: Peace

Ancient Reading ~ Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's Canticle)

Zechariah, John's father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesized:

Blessed are you, the Most High God of Israel,
for you have visited and redeemed your people.

You have raised up a mighty savior for us
from the house of David,
as you promised spoken through the mouths
of holy prophets of old:
salvation from our enemies and from the hands of all our foes.

You have shown mercy to our ancestors
by remembering the holy covenant you made with them,
the oath sworn to Sarah and Abraham,
granting that we, delivered from the hands of our enemies,
might serve you without fear, in holiness and justice,
in your presence all our days.

And you, my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before our God
to prepare the way for the Promised One,
giving the people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of sins.

Such is the tender mercy of our God,
who from on high will bring the Rising Sun to visit us,
to give light to those who live in spaces without illumination,
in the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Contemporary Reading ~ adapted from Eugene Peterson in "Run With The Horses: The Quest for Life at It's Best" (2009)

Living is difficult. There is much that goes wrong. We lay our plans carefully and things still go badly. We try to get ahead, but unaccountably something interferes, and we end up flat on our faces. Accidents. Weather. The general cussedness of life. Murphy's Law. In the midst of this there are some people who make it all seem better. There is a tone in their voices that dispels gloom. They have a smile that is infectious. Calm. Peaceful. They say that everything is going to be all right, and we believe them.

The task of a prophet is not to smooth things over but to make things right. The function of religion is not to make people feel good, but to make them good. Love? Yes, God loves us. But the love of God is intensely passionate, and seeks faithful, committed, passionate love in return. God does not want tame pets to fondle and feed, God wants mature, free people who will respond to God and the world with authentic individuality. For that to happen there must be honesty and truth. The self must be toppled from its pedestal. There must be pure hearts and clear intelligence, the confession of wrong-

doing and commitment in faith. And peace? Yes, God gives peace. But it is not a peace that gets along with everyone by avoiding the hint of anything unpleasant. It is not a peace achieved by refusing to talk about painful subjects or touch the sore spots. It is a peace that is hard won by learning to pray, by moving forward toward peaceful co-existence, justice, and equal rights. There is evil to combat, apathy to defeat, dullness to challenge, ambition to confront. There are persons all around us, children and parents, youth and adults, who are being trampled and violated, who are being hurt and despised. Any preaching of peace that turns its back on these is a cruel farce.