

“What’s Your Vision for Life?”

Isaiah 2:1-5

December 1, 2019

The King James version of Proverbs 29:18 gets quoted a lot these days: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Modern translations offer different slants to the verse.

Read Proverbs 29:18 from:

- NIV
- NRSV
- ESV
- The Message

Advent is a season that seeks to impact our lives. Our culture starts before the season of Advent, reminding us that Christmas is coming - and we need to prepare by buying whatever it is they are selling: Christmas lights, cards, decorations, toys, clothes, and the list goes on!

For the church, Advent is more a season that reminds us of prophecies; starting first in Genesis and continuing through Moses and the prophets; the prophecy that the Messiah is to come. These prophecies are fulfilled with the birth of Jesus - yet they are also prophecies and visions that await even greater completion upon Christ's return. As chapter 24 of Matthew's gospel teaches, Jesus promised that he would come back and we are to be ready for his return. Upon Christ's return a new age will be ushered in, when the earth, as we know it, will be changed forever.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a vision in today's passage of what the new age will look like: the house of God will be the place to be, as people will come to be taught all about God. Is that just a vision for end times? Or is it possible today, in our lifetime, that people will want to come to the house of God, to church, to holy gatherings in sanctuaries and other settings, to hear about God, to be taught God's word, to work and serve in such a way so that we will, in Isaiah's words: "beat . . . swords into plowshares, and . . . spears into pruning hooks"? Is Advent's preparation and hope as simple as The Message interprets Proverbs 29:18 to be: "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed."

If you turn on the TV during Advent, you will see a Christmas story being told almost every night - and multiple stories on most nights! One of the classics is Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. At the beginning of the story, it is clear that the only goal in life that Ebenezer Scrooge holds, is to make money, at any cost, no matter who it hurts: friends, family, or even himself. By the end of the story, Scrooge has quite a different vision of life and money, as he keeps Christmas by using his money to help others. He makes new friends, reunites with his family, and loves Christmas and life. What has changed for him? His vision! The messengers of Christmas past, present, and future give him a new perspective on life. And when his vision changes, his life changes!

How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss spins what some see as the same story. By the end of that story, the Grinch's heart grows three sizes as he begins to get a new vision of what Christmas in Whoville is all about, for:

It came without ribbons! It came without tags!

It came without packages, boxes, or bags!...

"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.

Maybe Christmas . . . perhaps . . . means a little bit more."

Are these stories, just nice stories we read to our children? Or, are these Christmas stories, classics, because there is truth within them; a truth based on the vision of God that we find in Isaiah today. Is the vision of today's text limited to the future, the end times, when people will come streaming to the house of Jacob to hear God's word? And in hearing, yearn to live that vision in their lives so much that they are willing to turn weapons into implements of peace that can help feed the world? Is that only a dream whose time has not yet come? Or is it a vision that becomes the church's calling here and now?

The calling to live this vision now, in this time, so that people understand that this season of Advent, which leads to Christmas, is not defined by ribbons and tags, purchases or installment plans. It is about the birth of Jesus. It is about being willing to take the risk to trust Jesus and live full-out in love for others. It is the willingness to risk sharing that love and call to which Proverbs 29:18 alludes: attending to what God has revealed in Christ's birth, and is revealing in Christ's life in our midst, and will reveal in Christ's final coming.

Are we willing to take the risk to share what God is doing in our lives, in the life of our church? Are we ready to follow the love of God wherever it takes us? For in truth, it will take us out into the world, beyond our Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. If we live the vision of Isaiah, people will come to find out what has changed - and what is in the process of changing still - in the community of faith. They will come to hear of God and experience God's love. With God's help, we can fulfill the vision God has called us to all along. Are you ready?