



*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*

Isaiah 52:7 – NRSV

Although I was quite young, I remember the race riots of 1967-1968. Living in urban New Jersey at the time, there was no way to escape their reality. They did not occur “someplace else” but some eight or ten blocks from my home. My father had a summer job working in that nearby city, and even though he had worked there every summer for 5 years or so, it became apparent that he was no safer than the other men with whom he worked. He was a health inspector, knowing most of the restaurant and coffee shop and deli owners, and he was a kind, honest man. That had earned him respect. He coached an inner-city, mostly black, teenaged boys’ basketball team; that had earned him love. Neither was going to keep him safe, nor his coworkers.

But in order to be safe, they were told not to wear a suit (the normal dress code), but sport coat and slacks. And never to wear shoes that tied – Dad was delighted to be able to wear his “cool” monk-strap boots. All of this was not to look like police, regardless of race. The fear of the police was rampant and often that fear was expressed as rage and with violence. Looking like police officers almost guaranteed they would be victims.

I did not want to lose my dad in that time of violence and rage, and I begged him not to go to work. He didn’t dismiss my fears but listened to them. Dad reminded me that he had to work so that we would have food and a house, but that he would be careful and his friends in the black community would help him avoid trouble. Dad also reminded me that God would look out for him, that God was in charge...

Now, with things going the way they are right now, it seems no easier to believe that God is in charge, that God reigns, anymore than it was for an eight-year-old back then. But Isaiah reassures us: the messenger of peace is beautiful, and will be lifted high as on a mountain. The one who brings good news will be welcomed, and that good news ***is*** “Your God reigns”.

We are called to work for the Kingdom of God, to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near. Jesus calls us to preach release to the captives and to the oppressed. We are called to labor for God’s realm, and each one of us has a part to play. Notice, if you please, that Isaiah doesn’t say that the messenger talks about salvation, but ***announces*** it! Salvation is here and free to all – all are made in God’s image, as the song says: “*Whether yellow, black, or white/ they are precious in his sight -/ Jesus loves the little children of the world.*”

So, what are we to do? ***BE*** each other’s keeper – have one another’s back, preventing discrimination in general, by all means, legal and interpersonal. ***SPEAK OUT*** against injustice and don’t let it take root. ***Look inside your heart***, for all of us are products of our culture and ‘none are righteous, no, not one’. ***PRAY*** to our Lord that Jesus will root out all that is displeasing to God, and let the Holy Spirit shine forth in your life!!!

¡Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus. Amen

~the Rev. Charlotte Wells+