

2020 12 13 Advent III On the Road to Restoration

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Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Luke 1:46-55

Read at the end: *Imagine the Angels of Bread*, Martín Espada, Puerto-Rican *declamador* (poet of the people) [Download the PDF](#)

View the poet on [YouTube](#)

Today we talk about the Road to Restoration. I believe that God has an audacious dream of restoration that is so total, so all-encompassing, that it is almost imperceptible. I believe that God is in the business of reconciling everything, and intends all humanity, and all creation, to be restored in the fullness of time. I believe that the words of prophets like Isaiah and Mary give us a glimpse of this Road to Restoration - just some of the many steps towards the ultimate restoration. We each get glimpses as we work for justice and peace and right relationships. The dream is too big for any individual to grasp. But we are responsible for dreaming it together, inviting others to share the road and bear the load.

Let's pray:

God of Advent hope, open our eyes, our ears, our spirits and our lives to your arrival. We walk the road together. Meet us along the way to strengthen us with bread for the journey. Help us to leave behind anything that does not belong in your beloved community. In the name of Jesus, our guide, we pray, Amen.

Two weeks ago we began our Advent Journey on the Road to Readiness. Michele spoke about the Holy Longings of Advent - the strong and good desires that sometimes bring tensions to the surface. In a world where so much is going wrong, Michele asked how many of us shared, with her, the sentiments of Isaiah, the wail for God to JUST DO SOMETHING. Michele told us that God invites us to offer our hopes, wishes, traditions and customs into God's hands, like clay into the hands of a potter. We do this in faith that God will craft our holy longings into what is necessary for this time and place. Readiness to accept this transforming work is the first movement of Advent.

Last week, Trent took us on the Road to Repentance. We walked the dusty road all the way out to a certain spot on the river Jordan - Long Walk Just To Turn Around. Repentance is turning around, turning back, turning to face the right way. In symbolic and prophetic language, in the invitation of John the Baptist, repentance is leaving behind the cities and civilization, entering the wilderness, descending into the the water and the sacred story of encounter with God - and then emerging and returning to the place you left behind, a person somehow new, a person somehow true. Advent treads the Road to Repentance as our calendar turns again to the beginning, to the original call, to the Control Alt Delete Are You Sure You Wish To Reboot?

And today, our Adventure takes us on the Road to Restoration. And doesn't restoration sound good? We need that promise, that hope. The restoration destination!

Good news to the oppressed, bandaging the brokenhearted, the captives liberated, the imprisoned set free. The year of the favour of God - surely the year of Jubilee, when debts are cancelled, when no work is demanded, when Creation gets a sabbatical, when enslaved people and exiled people and indebted people are restored to their full personhood, planted back in the land of their ancestors, owing praise and honour only to God.

And comfort to those who mourn. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. They shall be called oaks of righteousness, anchoring the people, blazing God's glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations of many generations.

The Road to Restoration. I dream of restoration, the return to original goodness, to elemental trust and the essence of faithful good living. A world where Black Lives Matter. A world where Love is Love. Where No One Is Illegal. A world where slogans like these are quaint, not divisive, obvious, not aspirational.

But that world cannot be restored, because it has not existed yet. It has to be built, but first, it has to be dreamed. And it's a strong dream, a dream of generations and peoples, not individuals. It's God's dream.

And God's dream is a dream of bread. Think about bread for a minute. I would wager that not one of us knows how to make bread. Bread is very complicated. Does any one of us know how to make bread? Does any one of us know how to plant, grow, and harvest wheat? How to gather yeast? How to purify water? How to grind and sift the flour, how to build the oven and heat the fire, how to proof the dough and time the bake and organize distribution and storage before it goes stale?

God's dream is a dream of bread. Every prophet knows that Bread is miracle, a daily visitation of the divine. Bread that comes from earth and rain and sunlight, from hands and ploughs, through stone and fire and time to nourish us.

I wouldn't be surprised if, between all of us, we could figure it out how to make bread. But then we need to think about butter! Bread is a miracle! Bread is a sign that points to the complex world of relationships that God has placed us within. Bread teaches that none of us can do without all of us.

When we offer God our holy longings, God makes them into the intricate components of the Bread that feeds us. God weaves our tattered hopes into a garment that can warm and comfort. And God does this slowly. God is a slow maker. God works with scraps and offcuts, with the leftovers. God works with precision and patience and vision.

The road to restoration is slow, because it is long, immeasurably long, because this road has space for everyone to travel on it. This is not some royal highway or a first class train. It's for all of us. God's patient work of restoration turns out to be cosmic in scope.

God's restoration means re-introducing some of us to the lessons of hunger. It means bringing down the proud from their thrones. At least, those are the words of the Prophet Mary, and they echo throughout scripture.

*Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
And the day of vengeance of our God.*

That 'day of vengeance' line troubles me. It's worth mentioning that when Jesus quotes this passage, he skips over the day of vengeance. It's not the focus of the passage, not the essence of God's justice, but... I understand how those whose wealth and power are enmeshed in oppressive systems need to know that God's justice is going to require something of them. God's justice is not progressive. It is not a steady line of increasing prosperity and peace and tolerance. The Biblical image is not a rising tide that raises all boats. It is a torrent, a flood that washes all oppression away, a fire that burns and refines.

I'm not trying to call anyone out here, I'm pointing myself out. I am one of those enmeshed in systems of violence and oppression. I'm the one who is meant to be troubled by that mention of vengeance.

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

Here I am, on the traditional territories of the Wyandot, the Haudensaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, an Anishinabe people. I know that acknowledging this is not enough. It is not justice. But it is a part. It helps me remember. It helps us imagine. God's justice includes repentance, and I'm grateful for that.

There are, it turns out, many parts to God's justice, just like bread, it's complicated and takes a long time to make! The Road to Restoration is not all roses. It is also thorns, and rainclouds, and manure. In other words, it's comprehensive, it is organic, it is immersive, baptismal. God's justice is total. It excludes no one. I'm sorry, rich people, powerful people, cruel people. God is coming for us, too. We are all God's body. We are all bread.

And bread is broken.

This week, beloved members of our congregation lost a beloved member of their family to a sudden sickness. A father and husband. This is unfair. It is not right. And, it happened. We know it's wrong. And we also know part of God's work in the world is responding to what is wrong, not to make it right or to explain it, or erase it or to exclude it, but to suffer it. To suffer the injustice and the brokenness and the wrongness of the world.

Do not misunderstand me. God is not asking us to suffer. God is not glorifying suffering or telling us that we suffer now to earn reward points in heaven. But God chose to enter this broken world and suffer alongside us, suffering through the sorrows and losses of life, suffering also the joy

and surprise, the hope and ache. Following Jesus means learning to suffer together. That's compassion. Sharing the load. Bearing together with God.

Is this glad tidings of comfort and joy? This is a holy mystery.

There is wrong and pain and injustice in the world. And God does not remedy this. Some are healed. Others are not. Some have their uniqueness accommodated and celebrated. Others find rejection.

Being a Christian, trying to follow Jesus, does not exempt us from loss. It makes us aware of loss. It makes us want to respond. It makes us follow Jesus into the hurting places.

Why doesn't God fix it? I think it is because God is not here for the holy, but for the whole. God is not in the business of calling one family, or one nation, or one religion. God's justice, God's dream of restoration is total.

God came for all, God insists on all, God demands a complete restoration, God leaves no one behind. Like bread, we shall be made one body that will rise together. There is no queuing for the resurrection, no one takes a ticket and waits for their turn at restoration. We shall all be restored together.

And God shall wipe away every tear. There shall be no more mourning or crying, not because they are bad, but because there will be no one left who needs our tears.

This is a holy mystery, and a hard one. Beloved ones, you may say to yourself, or to God, or to me, what is the good of this mystery. People need to eat. People need to mourn. What good is a vision of future restoration?

You are not wrong. Your passion, your anger, your mourning are part of God's vision. We are responsible for travelling our part of the Road to Restoration.

We're going to conclude this sermon with *Imagine the Angels of Bread*, a poem from the Puerto Rican poet Martín Espada. Let us hear the challenge and comfort of this prophet of our time. View the poet on [YouTube](#)

Questions

1. So far in Advent we've looked at Readiness, Repentance, and Restoration. Which one of these words best describes your experience of Advent? Are any of these words harder to understand?
2. How do you react to the image of God's dream being like bread - complicated, slow, miraculous? Is that a comfort or a challenge?

3. Most of us have experiences dealing with loss and grief. What has made grief easier for you to bear, and easier to face? Has grief ever changed your relationship with God - bringing you closer through support and care, or into a space of questioning or anger?
4. What dream of restoration (for yourself, your community, or the world) do you have? Is it easy for you to believe that God shares this dream?