

# IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple  
Sunday, December 13, 2020

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## **Isaiah 61:4, 8-11**

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

The Word of the Lord.

It was Christmas tide and my grandmother was visiting from Pittsburgh. Gram, as we called her, was in charge. My young parents finally had a break from the three kids. It was in that caregiving moment with my grandmother, that I decided to test the strength of my voice and will. The simple test was around consumption of Christmas cookies.

Gram said, “No more sugar cookies for you, young lady. They are delightful. We had fun icing them together. And three cookies were a gracious plenty. No more.”

It made me mad. Backing out of the kitchen chair, and angry, I shouted at her. I was mad. Feeling shame of having been limited, I ran up the stairs towards my bedroom, shouting, “I don’t like you. I wish you’d go back to where you came from. You are mean!”

Judgment. She had hers. I had mine.

It is my first memory of being caught in the judgment of another, one who loved me.

Judgment.

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It doesn't feel good to be caught in the grip of judgment. As a young girl, it didn't feel good to shout at one I loved. And, my Gram didn't stay in the kitchen, she chased me up the stairs and held me to account for my behavior. That didn't feel good either.

Judgment.

A judgment can be an opinion handed down by a court, or an opinion of another. And, a judgment can be considered a calamity caused by divine punishment. We tend to think about judgment like it is individualistic.

Between my Gram and me.  
Between God and me.

I wonder, if God's constant attitude with humanity is grace, then does God's judgement remove obstacles to that grace? In John 12, Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out." There's a battle at play - between this world we live in and God's good one.

Diana Butler Bass says,  
*"Advent speaks to something larger than our individual anxieties about personal salvation. It reveals that judgment is already underway; it is not just some future state. Throughout history, we humans have been subject to empires of oppression and violence; our dreams denied as we toiled on behalf of systems designed to benefit only a few. We've yearned for justice, for relief, to be treated with dignity and respect. The Bible describes a better world ..."*

The Bible describes for us the Kingdom of God - ruled by God, in Christ Jesus. A world in which Jesus holds a group accountable about making judgments too quickly. When the woman is caught in adultery, Jesus says, "let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone." They went away. They threw no stones. This is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has at its core peace through justice and love. The kingdom of Justice is where peace is for all people.

The world we live in is the Imperial Kingdom - ruled through time by Pharaoh and the leaders of empires. The Imperial Kingdom has at its core peace through victory. The kingdom of violence where peace is for the victorious at all costs. The kingdom of violence is for the few, and mighty.

The judgement to be found in Advent is when these two kingdoms contend at the arrival of the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God with us. The light breaking into this world, God's greatest joy. The Imperial Kingdom cannot stand in the face of that light. Time for brooding marks one free from Pharaoh's grasp. God is a God whose grace is for all and whose kingdom is forever.

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I wonder what obstacles need to be judged and overcome that we might know Good News this text from Isaiah claims, that we might build in this Advent season? How is it that we as the people of God can make time to brood about the ways we are bound by the Imperial Kingdom?

Sometimes I tell you that brooding space comes crashing in. A week ago Monday, post-surgery, I found Christ standing near my brokenness. I had wanted to be on the Zoom when David was announced by our PNC. I had wanted to be part of that joy. Instead, I was at home in Montreat in what I don't think of as my toe tag house, but at that moment, wasn't sure. But in that moment, I wondered because the pain was so intense. Jim tried to comfort me, console me. But I just barked at him "bring me my headphones! I need music." I needed music. And this is how I saw the Kingdom of God.

Jim fumbling to play something on my headphones, randomly hit a song. That song was *Gracefully Broken* and the Kingdom of God drew near and I started to cry. So Jim, fumbling to hit another song hit the next song, *I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art*.

The joy of Advent is among us. It is crashing in. To God who comes crashing in with that joy, be all glory now and forever.

Amen.