

Advent 2 Meditation: "Do you Hear What I Hear?"

In the 15th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontus Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Anna and Caiphas...*the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness... proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins...*

Do you hear what I hear? John the Baptist's story begins with a long list. The names are not important. Either is the place, ultimately. It's about the political roles: Emperor, Governor, Ruler, Priest—those believed to be closest to God. And yet who does the word of God come to?

The word of God does not come to Joe Biden or Donald Trump. It does not come to Elon Musk or Jeffery Bezos. It does not even come to the pope at the Vatican or some small church preacher like me. No. The word of God comes to the displaced, fiery-eyed seer on the margins declaring it is time to prepare the way of the Lord. Note: not prepare the way *for the Lord*. But "of" the Lord through a baptism of repentance. Do you hear what I hear?

Friends, God's word is still being proclaimed today in places least expected: spoken through the unhoused who sleep under bridges. Spoken through the impoverished who have no upward mobility. Spoken through the displaced who are tossed into the shadows. And spoken through those suffering from psychological distress. They are proclaiming God's word of repentance—to soften our hearts enough to consider a different way of seeing.

Of seeing them as a person, not as a problem.
Of seeing our collective sins which hide, criminalize, and institutionalize the poor and marginalized.
Of seeing how the church's silence over politics or other things that matter in the name of "keeping the peace" has caused the church to remain silent about God's true way of peace.

Of considering that the distress we see in our neighbor's life is not a reflection of who they are, but a reflection of who WE ARE as a community.

We will never achieve collective peace until we see the displaced as a part of who we are.

The poor are the prophets and truth-tellers of our time. They tell us who we are. They show our society a mirror image of itself: what we value, our spiritual poverty, and our collective sins which thwart our peace. *Do we hear them proclaiming a loving word of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? It is the word of God for the people of God.*