

Are You Hearing Voices? - December 20, 2015
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Are You Hearing Voices? Isaiah 2: 1-5

This past week I watched a documentary in which I was flown over Germany and was amazed at the country's physical beauty. In a sense, seeing Germany this way enlarged my understanding of my dad's birthplace.

As I watched, I compared the Season of Advent and Christmas with this video. Sometimes I forget (and, as Sylvia so gently reminds me) how easily I focus on one thing, that I am unaware of what is going on around me.

This time of the year is like a giant mixed salad. Love, JOY, laughter and great food are conjoined with sad memories, loneliness, depression, and even suicide. Christmas carols, events, and the decorations can produce sadness and cause some to withdraw. Hence, it is a good time to check your blood pressure more regularly.

Bodies of Christ, churches can experience similar options. It is possible for individual and groups to be so focused that there is no time for anything else. We listen to "Silent Night" but there is precious stillness to be found. And without it contemplative prayer, reflection, and gratitude are hard to find.

Advent and Christmas can also bring joy or irritation and anger. Worshipping together may be the only place where we can discover anew the help we need. It a place where we may re-orient, or, as Dr. Kirk might say, re-adjust ourselves. This part of the year is where we need God more than ever.

Do you recall a "Peanuts" cartoon, where Charlie Brown is sitting beneath a tree reading the Bible and ruminating? He is reading about Moses and God in a dialog. Charlie wonders what it would be like to verbally hear the voice of God. He turns to Snoopy and asks if he has heard a voice from above. In a bubble above the dog's head is Snoopy says, "Attention K-Mart shoppers!"

The prophet Isaiah's words challenge us to wrestle with what is the real reason for the season. He would have us consider the intention and significance of Advent worship. For it is here where we come to hear a word from above, where we begin to understand better the message of "Silent Night."

Isaiah also calls our Advent thinking to turn to believing that " ... He will teach us his ways (Isaiah 2:3) A key question for spiritual growth here, is in what way can we worship and live in humility, alongside the world and its values? As we worship, we listen for God's voice from above, for ways that we might grow in our love and dedication to God and others.

In a recent "Mindfulness" magazine article, I read about an event that may help us here. The author writes that his town held a meeting to address gang violence in their town.

The hall was packed, and along with the citizens, members from eight churches both attended and shared. It was reported that God's presence could be strongly felt. The church members demonstrated that they were interested in this issue and desired to help. In a way, wanting to help was an act of worship.

The town's police department reported they had found 287 people of varied age and backgrounds, who belong to gangs. As the meeting went on, city officers told the crowd what preventive actions they were doing for the youth not involved in gangs.

A church member raised the question, "What are you doing for the gang members?" The implication being God is not willing to let these young people be ignored, as if they were not worthy of the effort to help. A new discussion was started with the town's major and the chief of police, on developing a citywide plan to reach the gang members and their families. Because of these church representatives, a plan was developed where professional counselors would take anonymous calls from gang members, and direct them to people who help.

This is why Isaiah irritates us. The prophet, called by God, reminds us all that God loves everyone, and that everyone has value and is worth the time and effort it takes to reach out.

When we put our love into action miracles, happen.

Sounds a little like the reason for the season, doesn't? We are to reach out in love because, after all, is this not what God does when we do not take the high road?

So, how does the church, you and I, start such a journey? Verse five of chapter two says, "Let us walk by the Lord's light." Is it possible to exchange our guns and knives for

instruments of learning? Indeed, it is.

It begins as we allow the Season of Advent and Christmas, to call us to a deeper commitment to God, and all of God's children. In this sense, hearing voices from above is not a bad thing, especially at Christmas. Alleluia Amen.