

Growing up in Cokato, my family's main route into Minneapolis was Highway 12. It was a little less than fifty miles, but oh, that seemed like a long trip when I was in grade school. My sister and I would tick off the towns on our route – Howard Lake, Waverly (home of vice-president Hubert Humphrey at that time), Montrose, Delano, Maple Plain, Long Lake. Anticipation would start to increase as we got to Wayzata and we would make sure our parents noted the Baskin-Robbins 31 Flavors in the hope there would be a stop there on the return home. Highway 12 was now Wayzata Blvd, but there was still a lot of open country to cross. Ridgedale had not yet been built. Highway 169 was still a 2-lane County Road 18. But that's when the anticipation finally started. We knew that when we came over the hill by Uncle John's Pancake House (which is today the Perkins on Louisiana), we'd be able to see – the Foshay Tower, which at that time was the only tall building in Minneapolis. Today you look at the skyline and it's hard to see the Foshay Tower because it seems so small among the taller skyscrapers that have been built. But fifty years ago the Foshay Tower loomed large and it was the first thing we could see from a distance, letting us know our long journey was almost over.

We've been on a similar long journey with the Narrative Lectionary this fall. Instead of our destination being Minneapolis, our destination is Jesus. Instead of a trip of 50 miles, our trip is measured in years – almost 2000 years. We started in Genesis with the call of Abraham, when the LORD God made a covenant with Abraham, a three-fold promise – that Abraham would live in the land of Canaan, that his descendants would become a great nation, and that by means of Abraham's family, God would bless all the nations of the earth. With that destination in mind, we started out on our long journey. We paused at places on the route to hear the stories of Jacob, Joseph, Moses & the Ten Commandments, and Joshua. As we went past King David we noted another promise of God, that a descendant of David would always shepherd God's people. We saw that David's son, Solomon, built a great temple in Jerusalem as a place where the people could encounter the LORD God. After Solomon's death, we saw the kingdom divide into two – the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We listened to the prophets Micah and Isaiah exhort the people as they faced the threat of the Assyrian Empire and noted that Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. We moved on to hear Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel prophesy in the face of the next threat, the Babylonian armies that destroyed Jerusalem in 587.

It is now about 540 B.C. We still have over 500 years to go before we get to Jesus. The descendants of Abraham are now in exile in Babylon. They no longer occupy the land promised to Abraham. They no longer have a king who is a descendant of David. They no longer have a temple at which to worship. They are filled with questions, doubt, and despair. Why did the LORD God let this happen? Did the LORD cause this to happen? Are we being punished? Will the LORD God still keep the promises made to Abraham and David? Do we have a future?

Today on our journey to Jesus, we get to see the Foshay Tower. Our anticipation rises because we get the first glimpse of how this journey is going to end. We come to the words of a great prophet whose name we don't even know. We call him Second Isaiah because his writings were added on to the writings of Isaiah of Jerusalem who lived almost 200 years earlier.

The message of Second Isaiah to his despondent fellow exiles begins in Chapter 40 with these words, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid...Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Lord GOD comes with might...He will feed his flock like a shepherd." To a people filled with despair, Second Isaiah sounds a note of hope and expectation. God not only hasn't forgotten about you, God is going to come to you!

How is it that God will come to the people? In the passage we read this morning from Chapter 42, Second Isaiah introduces someone new. Set in a scene of the LORD God addressing the heavenly court, God says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth **justice** to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth **justice**. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established **justice** in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching."

Second Isaiah is very clear about what the purpose of the Servant will be. He states it three times. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint until he has established justice. That's about as clear as one can get. It's hard to miss. The problem for us is that the term "justice" has multiple meanings and the definition you and I use most often is not what Second Isaiah means.

I think for us we first think of justice as being fairness. It has something to do with the concept of law and having laws being applied fairly and impartially to everyone. If someone has been wronged by another, justice occurs when that wrong is made right. If someone has broken a law, justice occurs when that person receives an appropriate punishment. For those of us who think of justice in this way, we might understand the purpose of the LORD's servant to bring forth justice as having something to do with righting the wrong the people of Israel had experienced. Establishing justice would have something to do with righting the wrong of the destruction of Jerusalem by restoring the nation of Israel, returning to the land promised to Abraham and restoring the kingship promised to the house of David. That would be justice we would think.

But the Hebrew word *mishpat* that gets translated as justice is more complex than that. *Mishpat* justice has to do not so much with fairness as with seeing to it that God's will is carried out, that God's promises are kept. It is important to note that the Servant's task of bring forth justice is not only for the sake of Israel, but for **all nations** says Second Isaiah. And that brings us back to where we started our journey with the promise to Abraham some 1400 years earlier. Remember the three-fold promise? The LORD God promises Abraham a land, many descendants, and that by means of those descendants God will bless all nations of the earth.

On the one hand, the Servant described here is the people of Israel (the descendants of Abraham). It is indeed through Israel that God will bless all nations. But Second Isaiah will talk about this Servant three more times in the ensuing chapters and there the identity of the Servant becomes more ambiguous. It sounds like the Servant will be a particular individual. In chapter 49 the LORD says to the Servant, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

In Chapter 53 the Servant is described as a servant who suffers: "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity... Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities... All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The early followers of Jesus, when trying to make sense of who Jesus was, searched their scriptures and the only scripture they had was what we call the Old Testament. And in the writings of Second Isaiah and his description of the LORD's Servant who would come not only to the people of Israel but be a light to all the nations of earth, a Servant who would suffer and take upon himself the sins of all humankind, a Servant who would establish *mishpat* justice and fulfill the promises made to Abraham, they saw a description of the life and ministry of Jesus.

I am quite confident that today is the first and only time in human history that someone has tried to make a connection between Second Isaiah and the Foshay Tower, but that's my best shot at explaining the immense significance of Second Isaiah for the Christian community in shaping our understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, that in Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, a descendant of King David, God's *mishpat* justice is established for all nations of the earth. That includes you.

On this third Sunday of Advent, the message of Second Isaiah allows us to see that the Foshay Tower is on the horizon, our destination is in sight, the salvation of God is at hand. It's time to lift up our heads, take notice, and get excited.