

Our Most Beautiful Story

A number of years ago back when I still lived in Birmingham, I was the chairperson of the Alabama Methodist conference's social justice team. And in that role, I regularly wrote articles that were sent out to the conference mailing list where I tried to speak to contemporary issues of racial, economic, and social justice through the lens of faith. After one article I wrote, I remember getting all sorts of responses – some positive, some negative. But one person wanted to know why I wasn't outraged about some other issue. I didn't intend to come across as outraged at all, but that got me to thinking about outrage.

There's a lot of outrage – a lot of it manufactured about all sorts of things. And all of the outrage is about what we are against. We are against that policy, that group, that idea, that belief. And we are so against it, that we are in fact outraged by it – at least that's what I see and hear a lot of in the broader society.

And more and more, I think this attitude of outrage and of only speaking out about what we're against is counter productive. No don't get me wrong, there are certainly all sorts of things we should be against.

Jesus was against the "righteousness of the Pharisees." God and Moses were against Pharaoh. The prophets were against those who cried, "Peace, peace when there is no peace." But when I read the Advent readings, I notice that most of them—both in the gospels and in the prophets—don't spend a whole lot of time talking about what they are against. Instead, they paint a beautiful picture of what they are for.

"They will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation and neither shall they learn war anymore."

"And the young woman will be with Child and he shall be called Emmanuel, God with us."

"The people sitting in darkness have seen a great light."

That's one reason why I think what our kids did today is so important. I mean, it's literally impossible to be outraged about anything when you watch the cuteness and beauty and joy of what we saw today.

Advent calls us to move beyond just being against things and instead to tell a beautiful story – a story that is for all and against nobody. There's a reason why people who won't set foot in a church any other time of the year, show up on Christmas Eve. And I don't believe it is just because they are visiting family who go to church. It's because this time of year, we tell our most beautiful story.

The prophet Isaiah, staring down the Babylonian army, did not just prophesy a word against the Babylonians. He painted a beautiful picture.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,

and a little child shall lead them.

They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

This is a vision so beautiful, so compelling, we can't help but give ourselves to it.

Who wouldn't want to give themselves to a vision where no one will hurt or destroy? Where the lion and lamb can lay down together?

What if instead of spending time talking about all the things we are against—and there's plenty worth being against—we spent the rest of Advent just trying to live into such a beautiful story?

A story where:

Emmanuel comes a-singing,
Whose humble song is quiet and near,
Yet fills the earth with its ringing.
Music to heal the broken soul
And hymns of loving kindness,
The thunder of the anthems roll
To shatter all hate and injustice.

This is the beauty of Advent and the season where we are invited to live into our most beautiful story.