

He is coming

Jeremiah 33:14-16

November 29, 2015

Once upon a time ...

That's how all the good stories begin! Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived ...

... a dragon, a big bad wolf, a jealous queen, a wicked step-mother,

... a pale-skinned princess, a boy made of wood, a homely duckling, a girl with a red cape,

... a woodsman with a axe, a puppeteer, a jester playing a flute, an old man spinning straw, a fairy godmother with a wand, a half-dozen or so dwarves with pickaxes and shovels,

... and you! Because you are there, too, not literally there, of course, because there is no there, but there, really there, by imagination. You tremble in fear when you see the wolf's big teeth. Your life hangs in the balance as you prepare to take a bite of the poisoned apple. Your arms ache from sweeping out the ashes hour after hour day after day. You wonder what adventures and treasures await you at the top of the beanstalk.

Imagination takes you into this make-believe world where anything can happen and there you see see things you have never seen before, experience things you have never experienced before, feel things you have never felt before. Or perhaps these are things that you have seen and have experienced and have felt, but never fully understood before.

The world of fairy tales is a place for discovering new possibilities, not merely a place of entertainment or escape. It is a place where you may imagine what it means to be courageous, wise, clever, good, humble, loyal, determined, protected, happy. And it is a place where the perils of envy and greed and pride are made very clear.

It is a place where the very real demons of this world may be met and faced and overcome in imagination, so you may be better equipped to face them and overcome them here. Imagination invites you into a world that does not exist and will never exist, so you may live wiser and better in the world that does exist.

Once upon a time ...

The time is coming ...

The time is coming! You are invited into a world that does not exist, that you may only enter by imagination. This time, not a world that will never be, but a world that is not yet, but will be. This time not a world of make-believe, but a world of believe.

You see, faith is an exercise of imagination! Not of imagining other worlds, but of imagining this world in a new way, through imagination, finally seeing this world as it really is, not as it seems to be to the senses and to common sense, and seeing this world not only as it is, but also as it can be and as it will be.

The prophets are our storytellers, inviting us by imagination into the world as it will be, not to entertain us or to invite us to escape our lives as they are -- though a certain kind of faith, a false faith, does serve those purposes -- not to divert our attention from the distresses and temptations of this world, but to chasten, encourage, warn, empower, comfort, edify.

And so the prophet says: The time is coming. The time is coming when the Lord will keep his promise ... when the Lord who seems so long in coming will come ... when the Lord who seems so very far away will draw near ... when the Lord will give us a king, a leader, who will do what is right and just.

And we will be safe. We will be safe! Safe from all that terrorizes us. Safe from all that hurts us. Safe from jealous people and greedy people. Safe from bigots and fanatics. Safe from people who mock us or harass us or abuse us or take advantage of us. And safe too from our own failings -- our own infidelities, our own insensitivities, our own sins. Safe because of him. Safe because he will do what is right and just. Safe because he will teach us to do what is right and just.

By imagination, the prophet invites us into this world, a world where justice and righteousness prevail, because of him. This is not the world we live in now. We are not always safe now from harm. We are not always safe now from people who intend us harm. We are not always safe now even from the harm we bring on ourselves. But this is a world we can imagine, and because we can imagine it, it is a world we can live for now and even live in now ... by the power of imagination, by the power of faith.

Faith is always about the future. One day, we will not need faith anymore, because we will see face-to-face, but meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love. Faith -- imagination -- gives us the will and the energy to keep on keeping on and shows us the way to go. Faith -- imagination -- holds the vision of the world that will be when he comes before our eyes and hearts so we will not faint, so we will not give up, so we will not be fooled into putting our trust in anything or anyone that is less than just, anything or anyone that is less than right.

Faith is always about the future. And so it is we celebrate the season of Advent year by year, not merely looking back, remembering that he came to us, once upon a time, but looking forward, remembering that he is coming to us.

The time is coming. That's how all the best stories begin! The time is coming. He is coming!