

“You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I’m telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. He’s making a list. Checking it twice. Gonna find out who’s naughty and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town.”

Suddenly, that jolly old elf is manifesting a moral order in which actions have consequences. Dare we risk finding ourselves on the naughty list? So we pick up our toys (or tools – same thing). We say “please,” “thank you,” and “of course we’ll make Pastor Dave lemon bars.”

Hmm, someone’s risking the naughty list!

Psalm 72 invites us consider a different wish list; rather than presents under a tree, God’s future invades our present transforming the world we know into the world we long for. So it is that this Advent, in this world where injustice corrupts and corrodes our lives in so many ways, and there is so much suffering that causes us to cry out, “It’s not right;” in this world, we join David and pray: *Psalm 72:1 (NRSV) Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son.*

These wishes will come true; they are the heart and soul of what Christmas is about: Christ, our King, is born! God’s promise is at work in this world. Make a list! Check it twice!

### ❶ Make a List – the World We Want

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Advent is the time we look forward; the time for us to “prepare the way,” and to “prepare the way,” we need to prepare; we need to make a list.

God’s judgment is the last thing we’re going to put on our list! We don’t want God to judge us; we want God to forgive us, to have mercy on us, to cleanse and redeem us. We’re all too aware that *Romans 3:23 (NRSV) ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

But as David prays, *Psalm 72:1 (NRSV) Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son*, the first thing on his list for God to give to make that prayer a reality is judgment: *Psalm 72:2 (NRSV) May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.*

The difference between David’s list and ours has to do with the verdict we expect; we expect the verdict to be against us; we fear that when the King judges, he will find us guilty and punishment will follow – “he’s gonna find out whose naughty and nice.”

The Psalms invite us to imagine a different verdict; a verdict in our favor; a verdict that sets things right on our behalf. This verdict is the answer to every anguished “why;” “why has this happened?” “Why her, why him, why now?” This verdict declares to every despairing, “How long, O Lord, how long?” “Not long.” *Isaiah 11:6–9 (NRSV) 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. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. 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.*

David and Solomon (and all the kings who followed them) did not get Israel there; the vision of Psalm 72 remained an unrealized ideal, but that didn’t stop them from hoping; it didn’t stop them from dreaming; it prepared the way for Messiah to come; the king who makes the vision a reality.

We’re not there yet; we’re still waiting, but we wait in hope for Christ our King has come, and God’s future is making the vision a reality. As Sam Cook sang in his classic Civil Rights Anthem, “*There have been times that I thought I couldn’t last for long/but now I think I’m able to carry on/It’s been a long time coming, but I know a change is gonna come.*”

Until that day comes, make a list.

## ② Check it Twice

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Item 1 on our list: Mahatma Gandhi taught us: “Be the change you seek.”

Psalm 72 is a prayer of David for Solomon. In it, we hear the longings of a father for his son; we hear the hope of a king who built a kingdom for what

his heir will accomplish. We hear the expectation that power will be wielded well.

We who pray this prayer today wield two significant forms of power. We're not kings; we're citizens of the United States of America. We have a voice. We have a vote. And as much as we want to believe that “you can't fight city hall” and that nothing can change; that simply isn't true. The Exeter Public Library is but one example of how we successfully did fight and win (and need to keep fighting). Our political system has its challenges, but our Christian faith equips us with the one power against which our system is powerless: Hope. Hope inspired by the vision of the kingdom of God and the promise that God is at work in this world. Hope that empowers us to persevere; to speak, to act, to work to be the change we seek.

We are Christian citizens in the United States; and we are Christian consumers in the world's largest economy. Here's a fun fact I learned this week; we hear a lot about China's economy; according to the World Bank, China's gross domestic product is \$7 trillion. The United State's gross domestic product is \$15 trillion. Our economy is more than double the second highest economy; it equals the gross domestic products of Japan, Germany, France, and Brazil #3-5 combined!

And all of those trillions of dollars depend on you and me; for we are American consumers. Turn on a Christmas special, and before we get to Dasher and Dancer, here's a message inviting us to exercise our purchasing power.

Be the change you seek. Buy the change you seek. Make a list. Check it twice. Give gifts that support justice and righteousness and you'll give gifts that truly keep on giving.

This week we were reminded of the potential we have for justice and righteousness. We were reminded of Nelson Mandela, the dismantling of the institutional racism that was apartheid, and the blood-free birth of the new South Africa.

**The International Crisis Group [of the Presbyterian Church] had this to say on the death of Nelson Mandela:**

"The world has lost the most inspiring figure of the last century. Relentless in resistance, extraordinarily generous in victory, Nelson Mandela never put himself ahead of his ideals. He endured long imprisonment without bitterness. As South Africa's president, he wielded great power but he never clung to it. He knew when to compromise, and when not to. His wisdom made him the hero of South Africa, of the continent and of the entire world. Long live his wisdom."

We would be wise to recognize some of that wisdom as we seek internal peace in South Sudan. One thing that this great man had to say was, "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner." Another was, "Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill your enemies."

May we all take this to heart both for our own peace and to honor one of the greatest men ever to live.

*Psalm 72:1 (NRSV) Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.*

"Be the change you seek." "A change is gonna come." Be Christian citizens; Christian consumers. Give gifts that truly make a difference. Make a list. Check it twice. Amen.