

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 2:2-5

Pew Bible O.T. pg. 631-632

²In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

Isaiah 2:2-5 (First Sunday in Advent)

11/30/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Altogether Peace: Swords Into Plowshares"

Pastor Amy Terhune

I'm going to begin this morning with a video clip from September of 2023 of a segment on WNEM, mid-Michigan news. This is Rev. Corey Simon, a United Methodist Pastor and colleague currently serving Simpson UMC in Bangor, MI. His side ministry is called Disruptive Disciples Blacksmithing.

<https://www.wnem.com/2023/09/21/pastor-brings-passion-peace-into-forge/>

What would a less violent world look like? And what does it mean to promote peace? This year, following the course of our book study, we begin Advent by exploring the divine promise of peace. And by peace, I don't merely mean the absence of conflict. I'm referring to something deeper. In Philippians 4:7, the Apostle Paul called it "the peace that passes understanding". This kind of peace is God-given. It protects us from being overwhelmed by anxiety and can sustain us even when the world around us is chaotic, stressful, dangerous, or filled with adversity. While we can never achieve this peace for ourselves by ourselves, we can cultivate it through prayer and faith in God's abiding presence.

My favorite way to understand this kind of peace is to look at a submarine in a hurricane. When hurricane Erin passed off the US coast this summer, it produced waves some 50-70 feet on the surface, even though it was only category 3. Ironically, Hurricane Melissa, which was a category 5 storm when it hit Jamaica was only producing waves about 20-30 feet because of the more erratic wind patterns. But deep below the surface, in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, US submarines weathered the storms much more easily than their surface-faring counterparts such as cruisers or frigates. As long as a submarine can dive below 400 feet, or about 150 meters, they can continue operations with no disturbance from what's happening up on the surface. Pressure, density, and salinity all contribute to cushioning the submarine in the water.

When we dig deep, allowing God to move within us, inviting the Spirit to inhabit our inmost sanctuaries, the spirit essentially functions like the ocean depths. It does not save us from the storms and suffering we weather, but it cushions us, anchoring us deep within God's presence, allowing us to continue to function – to think, to serve, to live courageously. This is the peace Jesus tapped as he gave his life on the cross. This is the peace that Paul tapped when dragged before tribunals and beaten with rods. This is the peace that Martin Luther tapped when the arrayed might of worldly power from every

corner of Europe demanded he recant his writings decrying the selling of indulgences. This is the peace Martin Luther King Jr tapped into when they turned on the firehoses. This is the peace Mother Theresa tapped into as she walked the streets of Calcutta ministering to those with dysentery, tuberculosis, malaria, pertussis, pneumonia, and every kind of mental and spiritual disorder. This peace is not logical. But it is sustaining and life-giving. And this is the divine peace that forms a basis for hope, for love, for joy deep within.

But as we turn to our lesson today from Isaiah, we can see that this is not merely a personal or inward reality. Isaiah looks to a day when peace will be real in our world. When nations really will beat weapons into other tools used in times of peace and prosperity. In that day, it says that Zion will rise above all other cities, yet people will stream up to it.

“Imagine for a moment a stream of water flowing up a mountain. Impossible, you say. The laws of gravity make it nearly impossible for water to flow uphill. But occasionally, waves of the ocean can move uphill, either because they are pushed by strong winds or drawn by the moon’s gravitational pull. A few earthquakes have caused rivers to temporarily reverse course. Robin Bell, a geophysics professor from Columbia University, says that massive ice sheets in the Antarctic create downward pressure on the streams underneath, causing some of those streams to flow uphill from the pressure. [from Can Water Naturally Flow Uphill? by Laura Geggel, March 26, 2017, <https://www.livescience.com/58416-can-water-naturally-flow-uphill.htm>.]

“But it takes a powerful force of nature, like heavy ice plates or an earthquake to defy the pull of gravity and move water uphill. In the same way, it takes the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds to inspire us to turn from our selfish, sinful ways and seek God’s ways. Yet, this is the vision of the future that Isaiah announces. [2 ¶s from “A Vision of Beauty and Hope” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

On this first Sunday of Advent, we are mindful that we stand in between times. In this season, we find ourselves drawn in two directions. We long to look back at the first Advent of God, when Christ came as a vulnerable baby in Bethlehem. But Isaiah calls us to look ahead to a day when the peoples of the earth will say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...” We hear the call to go up, but we acknowledge that it’s simply too high and too steep for sin-laden humanity to climb. So, when we could not climb up to God, God came down to us. [adapted from “A Mountain Too High to Climb” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

Jesus has come to heal the division between humankind and God – to bridge the gap. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us. He gives his life to redeem us from sin. And He points us to the work of building the Kingdom of God among us. King Duncan tells a wonderful story about how, in 1941, when Hitler’s armies were invading the city of Leningrad, “...the staff of the famous Hermitage Museum worked around the clock to load priceless paintings and sculptures onto three trains and move them to a safe hiding place.

“The Nazi army blockaded the city of Leningrad for some 2 ½ years, causing more than 600,000 citizens to die from starvation. Through that time, the director of the Hermitage Museum decided to keep the museum open, even though most of its artwork had been sent away. He felt that the beauty of the building would buoy the spirits of the suffering citizens of Leningrad. But bombing around the city of Leningrad soon damaged the Hermitage Museum, and snow and water got through the broken windows. The museum brought in Russian soldiers to help shovel out the snow and broken glass, mop up the water, and sadly, board up those gorgeous windows.

“To thank the soldiers for their work, a museum guide named Pavel Dubchevski offered to give the soldiers a tour of the museum. What was there to see? It was a nearly empty shell of a building. But Dubchevski began walking through the rooms of the Hermitage and describing in beautiful, vivid detail each work of art that had hung on the walls. He painted word pictures of the marble statues that had

graced each room. And as he described the art that had once hung there, the soldiers began to see the museum through Dubchevski's eyes. They began to see the beautiful works of art that had once been in those rooms; the beautiful works of art that would grace those rooms again once the war was over. And in the middle of war and starvation and suffering, Pavel Dubchevski gave those soldiers a vision for the future. [3 ¶s adapted from "A Christmas Story" by the Rev. Keenan Kelsey, Noe Valley Ministry, Presbyterian Church (USA), as used in "A Vision of Beauty and Hope" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

Isaiah shows us a Vision for the future, too. In it, God is not lauded as a king or ruler, so much as a teacher and a judge. But not that kind of Judge that sits on a throne, pounds his gavel, and hands out punishments. This judge serves as a mediator – one who settles disputes, resolves differences, finds solutions. The judge can't do that by treating some like dirt and others like princes. He can't do that with partiality or favoritism. Instead, Christ sees the dignity, the beauty, the preciousness of every people and every tribe. He can accurately weigh claims, but he's also able to teach the people – all the people – about a still more excellent way – the way of love and peace and beauty. And not only teach it, but live it, model it. Jesus not only heals the division between humankind and God, but Jesus heals the divisions that plague humankind and divide us from one another.

"Robert Capa was a famous photojournalist who specialized in war photos. He risked his life on the front lines of battle to photograph the Spanish Civil war and World War II. Particularly legendary, are his photos of D-day on the beaches of Normandy. Tragically he was killed by a landmine while on assignment in Vietnam in 1954. Robert Capa used to joke that someday his business card would read like this: Robert Capa, War Photographer—Unemployed. [adapted from Allison Adato, "Camera At Work," a profile of war photojournalist Robert Capa, *Life* March 1997, pp. 98 and 100.]

"He was right. Someday, all who write about war and profit from war and suffer from war will be unemployed. When Jesus's second Advent finally happens, when he comes as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, He will restore the original design of creation. Jesus will restore our peace with God and peace with each other. And all the selfish, sinful impulses that compel us to turn against one another will be transformed by God's love. [2 ¶s from "A Vision of Beauty and Hope" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] That's the vision. That's the promise.

If you're anything like me, the temptation is to blow off such a vision as fantastical, fictional, or at the very least, unrealistic. We don't really think human nature can change. We believe war to be inevitable. After all, humankind has been at war for about 95% of its existence on this planet, according to most historians. But this lesson confronts us with our own resignation; our own inability to hope, to have faith that God can do what is not possible for humankind on our own. Sometimes, one must believe it to see it. So, what would a less violent world look like? And what does it mean to promote peace?

Let me close with a fable from James S. Hewett"

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a sparrow asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing," was the answer.

"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the sparrow said. "I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow—not heavily, not in a raging blizzard—no, just like in a dream, without a sound, and without any violence. And since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch, nothing more than nothing, as you say, the branch broke off."

"Having said that, the sparrow flew away.

"The dove, since Noah's time an authority on the matter, thought about that for awhile, and finally said to herself, "Perhaps only one person's voice is lacking for peace to come to the world." [5 ¶s from Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Illustrations Unlimited, by Editor James S. Hewett, illustrations for Peace on www.Sermons.com.] Perhaps that voice is yours. Amen.