

Makers of Peace, Providers of Plenty

Isaiah 2:1-5
December 11, 2022

First Presbyterian Church
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The Prophet Isaiah gives voice to God's vision of a world of peace among all people, a vision that comes into focus through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we prepare to explore in our sermon today the connection between Isaiah's prophecy and the promises that Christ brings, let us take a moment to bask in the beauty of liturgical dance, featuring the Christmas carol "O Holy Night," a hymn that speaks to God's vision and promise.¹ Couldn't you just feel during that dance the peace and joy that Christ brings, a peace and joy we long for with the same feeling and emotion as our dancers? Thank you, Melissa, Danisha and Jayla for sharing that with us.

The Prophet Isaiah in today's Old Testament reading foreshadows a time when all the world will bask in such a Spirit of hope, peace, joy and love. Isaiah's prophesy guides us as we seek to bring this heavenly vision into fuller focus. It's a prophesy, a vision that comes over us in sacred places, filling us with divine wisdom and instruction, and entrusting to us the holy work of furthering God's plan and purpose.

Isaiah says, "In 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...." Well, the mountain of the Lord's house in biblical terms is called Zion, the place where followers of the Lord can live and serve God alongside one another. It's any sacred place, like this church.

What makes this church, this place so special? Is it the beauty of wood beams and panels, the symbols we see, the warmth we feel as light streams through stained glass windows? All of that is quite special. But what really makes this place a sacred space is just two things – us and God's word.

That's what we get here that we get nowhere else in life. Nowhere else do we gather with this diverse group of people all sharing in the spirit of Christ. We are drawn in faith to come to this place seeking an encounter with God, seeking divine wisdom and instruction.

As Isaiah says, "Many 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 his 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.'"

¹ *Liturgical Dance, O Holy Night, Melissa Roe-Wilson, Danisha Walker and Jayla Walker, see such a performance at <https://youtu.be/T0hj1cuCiJY>.*

We gather in this place to hear God's word for us, both individually and as a people, as people committed to living and learning and working alongside one another, despite any difference we may have, and in many ways because of our difference, because God uses a wide range of gifts and talents and perspective to accomplish his purposes, to bring about his vision.

"... Out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Our holy work and calling is to go forth from this place to share news of God's vision for humanity, God's vision for all creation.

What do you think God desires for us, for this world? That's what we come here to learn and affirm, right?

When it comes to God's vision, we have here in Isaiah a pretty clear picture of what it is, and what we can do to help share it and bring it about. Isaiah says, "(God) will judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples. They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Turning swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks – the weapons of war into the tools of life, tools that bring forth food for the body, and in that, food for the soul, as well.

How might you – how might we – turn weapons of war into tools of life? I'm reading a book that actually depicts this very thing. It's an historical fiction about life in the year 997 CE, complete with 10th century Viking raids, religious and political battles, love and marriage.

In the book, titled "The Evening and the Morning" by Ken Follett, a young man named Edgar flees a Viking raid with his family, who are forced to become farmers in order to survive in a new land. While they don't know much about farming, Edgar is a boat-builder and quite handy, able to make things out of whatever's lying around at the time.

One day, his brothers come to him, saying, "We're going to make a plough." Edgar looks at the wood his brothers have gathered and visualizes a plough. While his brothers work on the timber, Edgar goes about making the ploughshare, which is the blade on the front of the plough that cuts through the soil. He uses an old rusty spade to make the ploughshare, heating it in a fire and beating into shape with a rock. He then sharpens the blade with a stone.

Turning a spade – not a sword but a spade – into a ploughshare. How might you turn weapons of war into the tools of life?

Perhaps it's as simple as turning our anger and upset into compassion and acceptance. Less fighting and more loving. What a Christmas gift that would be!

Unfortunately, we live in a world where there seems to be less loving and more fighting, a world where the tools of life get turned into weapons of war.

We see that happening in Ukraine, where Russia is bombing their energy plants to deprive them of the fuel and electricity needed to heat their homes this winter. That's an extreme example of turning the tools of life into a weapon of war, a tragic example of what happens when people attack other people, when they fail to embrace and honor our shared humanity.

And we see other examples throughout our society, in our communities, and, even in our homes, wherever it is that our passions get the better of us – anger and fear turning us against each other, scarcity causing us to hoard that which should be shared.

No. We are called to be makers of peace and providers of plenty – turning swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. And the only way we can do that is by allowing God to be the one who leads us.

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples.” God sent Jesus into the world to show us the way of peace. And Jesus will come again in the fullness of God's purpose, the fullness of God's vision, bringing an everlasting peace to us and to all the world.

Until that time, then, let us all find ways to bring peace to any upset and anger we encounter, and the assurance of God's provision to any need we may meet. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God, true Hope of all the earth: Prepare in us a warm and welcoming place, where we may receive the King of Creation with gladness and kindness and faithfulness.

In the center of our crowded days, create a quiet place of light and peace, where we can keep these holidays as the holy days they were meant to be.

We thank you for the blessing you bring in Jesus Christ, and ask that you show us how to live in love and grace, justice and compassion.

We see the good you desire for us and through us, in friendships that nurture and loving relationships that sustain, in communities that work together to improve their common life, in a world full of gifts to share.

We remember those whose hearts are breaking in grief, whose loneliness threatens to overwhelm them.

We ask your comfort and mercy. We pray for those in need of strength and healing. Come alongside them in their moment of need.

We offer our prayers in the name of the one for whom we wait, who walks with us even in our darkest times, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.