

First Sunday of Advent-November 27, 2022

The text for the sermon:

Isaiah 2.1-5 *The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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 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. 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 any more. 5O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

SERMON

The words from this scroll of Isaiah sound encouraging and hopeful. Considering People living in the Northern Kingdoms of Israel had fled to Judah and Jerusalem, optimism was hardly the order of the day. Not for want of trying things like military alliances with other countries and eventually seeking asylum with their Southern siblings. The invaders proved relentless and they were pressing on to Judah and Jerusalem.

The First scroll of Isaiah functions like a warning beacon that another storm surge is rumbling our direction. The strategies and defences failed, so what's next? How can we be both realistic and hopeful?

The three scrolls of Isaiah represent the faith questions of several generations. Earlier generations, saw the storms approaching; their descendants were deported, and finally their descendants returned from exile only to find that home was nearly unrecognizable. And where do we find God in all of this?

Are visions of swords into ploughshares wishful thinking—or is this the prophetic imagination? Former US President Dwight Eisenhower delivered a speech in 1953 titled "The Chance for Peace". Who knew a politician—a former military general at that— could speak with such a prophetic imagination...here are some of his words:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.

The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter plane with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.

This is, I repeat, the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. ... Is there no other way the world may live? (Dwight D. Eisenhower "A Chance for Peace" 1953).

Is there no other way the world may live? Maybe there is... This year Canada paid roughly 7.4 billion or about 1.4 percent of the gross domestic product on military spending. Compare that to a country adjacent to us that spends nearly one hundred times that amount and that 7.4 billion sounds pretty good. The Canadian government's official websites report that in 2022, 5.4 billion dollars will be budgeted for dental care for children from low income families and also for people with disabilities.

Advent is a season of yearning for lasting peace, aggression flipped to altruism. We yearn for glimpses of God at work in the world...in our churches and in us.

Earlier this week many from our two churches got together for coffee and conversation. I listened in by telephone and sensed a good deal of 'faith-ing' going on. Folk were honest in voicing the limits of optimism that what we've accomplished, or what we plan might actually work.

Perhaps true to the Advent Season some prophetic imagining happened too. How is God showing up in our neighbourhoods and in our churches?

Hope is what remains when we're in over our heads. If we're honest that's most of the time. Hope acknowledges that "God has got this...all of this..."

The prophet looks out his window and sees the troops advancing and the community unravelling. The prophet also sees God's doing in the world and sees lasting peace as God's end game.

May God open our eyes and hearts to see and bear witness that God shows up in our world and our lives in all sorts of ways even when it's so much easier to see the storm swirling about. Amen