

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Peace is... Cutting Edge

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSVUE)

¹ The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² 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;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³ 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.

⁴ He 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.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 24:36-44 (NRSVUE)

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Bible/Sermon Focus

One of the reasons that the Bible is such a powerful witness is because the majority of the stories come from people in a time of distress; they are about difficult situations for a community. The Bible acts as a witness that God redeems even the most traumatized communities and will make a way for them through their hardships.

Even if we *know* that about God, even when we *feel* it in our bones, it is easy to slip into cynicism and doubt. We humans are not created to always be hopeful, or happy, or complacent. It is from the deep well of our human experiences and feelings that we are able to make assessments about the world, and when we see injustice, suffering, or hardships around us, we are affected, and moved to help make a change.

But sometimes we forget our calling. Sometimes we are weary, or sometimes we just can't quite see to what God is calling us to respond. It is in those times that God sends a *prophet*.

Prophets in the Old Testament arose at the same time as the kings. They were not exactly fortune tellers, more like truth tellers. The prophets would speak on behalf of God when the people, especially when the elites, the upper-class, and particularly when the kings would participate in the oppression of the "least of these." The law of God had been given to the people (ALL of the people) to protect the most vulnerable. But often it was the most vulnerable who were in fact being exploited by the elite.

Prophets also brought a hopeful vision back to the people when the world seemed hopeless. God would endow the prophets with a picture of what God's kingdom could look like, and what it will look like one day. And the people of God desperately needed a hopeful vision in the first section of the prophet Isaiah.

1st Isaiah (Chapters 1-39) was written during the time when the Assyrian Empire was conquering the known world. The once united Kingdom of Israel had split in two during a civil war in 932 BCE, leaving the Southern Kingdom of Judah with the temple, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel worshipping at high-holy places. When the Assyrians invaded, the Northern Kingdom fell in the year 722 BCE.

Isaiah wrote as a prophet during this bloodbath, during the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, watching this community lose battle after battle. I often wonder how many plowshares, bells, and kettles had been melted down to make the weapons needed to try to fight off the Assyrians. How many men were killed? How many women were raped, and villages pillaged? This was the military style of the Assyrians. They came in, they conquered, and then they stayed on the land, mingling with whomever survived and remained.

During times of great loss, war, and occupation it is not uncommon to hear people ask, "When?"

"When, O God, will all of this suffering, all of this war, all of this destruction, finally end?" This was a question that the disciples and the people of God asked Jesus all of the time. After all, the Jewish people had remained an occupied people for generations, this time under the rule of Rome. Our Gospel lesson from Matthew today is one of the responses Jesus gave the

people about “the end of it all.” Just as, 750 years or so before Jesus, Isaiah offered a vision of hope to the people of God.

There will be a day. There will be a day when peace will happen. When we will no more know of war. When we get rid of all of the weapons. When we tend gardens, live in peaceful community, and worship God. And learning to live in the anticipation of that, as well as in preparation for that day, is what we as Christians are called to do.

Advent is a season of preparation, and season of waiting. As we prepare for the light of God to return to the world, as wars rage on around our globe, as we witness gun violence in our own nation, we must ask, “What are we waiting for?”

Peace. We are waiting for peace. We are working for peace. We are praying for peace. We are praying for a vision. We are praying that we too can see what Isaiah saw, that spark of hope. That vision from God.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Advent mean to you?
2. What do you do when things feel hopeless?
3. Who are the prophets or people that help renew your hope for peace in the world?
4. How is the Peaceable Kingdom imminent? How is it already here?
5. What can we, as members of a church, do to support the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom?

Prayer

O Lord, our hope, our redeemer, we pray that we are able to catch your vision of the Peaceable Kingdom. We ask that our materialism, our apathy, and our cynicism, be removed by you, O God. Show us the spark of hope, of peace, of love, and of joy. Prepare us to receive you. **Amen.**

“Don’t stop after beating the swords into plowshares, don’t stop! Go on beating and make musical instruments out of them. Whoever wants to make war again will have to turn them into plowshares first.” - Yehuda Amichai