

“Come”

Isaiah 2:1-5

I know of many families that have traditions during the Advent and Christmas season that include taking the entire family to a stage production like *The Nutcracker* or Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. I recently learned about a charming verse story for children, that was made into a musical a few years back, which stars a moose who is determined that his family’s Christmas will be “perfectly perfect.” In the book *Moostletoe*, Moose “shopped till he dropped. Check.” and “baked tons of tins of cookies. Check.”—but in his haste he completely forgets to buy a Christmas tree.

After a long, fruitless search in the snow on Christmas Eve, he finally has to do the heroic thing: stand in a corner and become the tree himself. “The kids tried to make the best of it. They said, ‘Oh so who needs a tree?’ But Moose could plainly see they were short on the glee.” (I think the rhyming must be part of the amusement value! 😊)

All of us have holiday traditions, events and goals that we look forward to and plan for in this season of the year. These things give us a greater sense of hope and a feeling of anticipation. But we can’t assume they will happen without us taking some action to purchase tickets and make arrangements.

In the seventh century before Christ, Isaiah was proclaiming to the people of his day that hope for the world was coming soon. He described a time when God would rule and reign and the world would enjoy real peace. He was speaking to a divided community. There was much pessimism and hopelessness. The world was in a shambles and people lived in darkness. But, things were about to change. Isaiah urged people to hope rather than fear.

This hope however, required that they *do* something. It called them to *participate* in the promise of future peace by taking some action. The sooner the better, because failing to take action would delay the possibility of more hopeful times. For instance, like Moose, you may have to stand in the corner and become the Christmas tree yourself if you forget to take action, buy a tree and decorate it before Christmas comes.

So I ask, how can we help to bring about Isaiah’s vision of hope and peace this year? How can we help to make the reign of God a reality for our day and time and for the world we live in? What action needs to happen to make Isaiah’s vision of a peaceful world come true?

First, we need to listen to the word of God. Isaiah calls us to the mountain to receive instruction.

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths” (v. 3). In our world there are far too many distractions and too much noise. It’s almost impossible to tune out the noise and to tune into the teachings of God because we are changing channels so fast we don’t pause long enough to hear God’s message.

I really wasn’t trying to eavesdrop, but last Saturday as Jayne and I rode home from New York City on the Megabus, a student boarded the bus when we stopped at State College. His seat was one row ahead of us across the aisle, so I had a straight view of his smart phone screen. I noticed that he didn’t remain on

any one page for very long, but using both thumbs he jumped from social media to game sites to photos at light speed. I was thinking that his eyes must be suffering fatigue given how quickly he changed from one thing to the next.

Perhaps we will miss out on the coming kingdom because we are too busy changing channels or swiping from one screen to the next. We just might miss something important by flipping from one thing to the next impatiently. *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...”* **Listen to the voice of God.** Tune in and concentrate on the messages of the Lord and follow his instructions for living and for life.

Second, peace becomes a reality when we participate in the process with our own hands. Isaiah tells us, *“They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks”* (v. 4). In other words, he wants us to exchange our weapons for garden tools. Rather than use things that are harmful to others, we need to be planting seeds and cultivating the soil.

Basil Mathews was walking along the dusty streets of an Arab village. He met a young, tall, Arabian boy playing a flute. He asked to see the flute and it seemed surprisingly heavy. After examining it he discovered it was made out of an old gun barrel. The boy explained that he had picked up the gun in an area where there had been fierce fighting. He filed it down and drilled holes in it. From a weapon of destruction he had created an instrument of music. (from *Ride the Wild Horses*, by J. Wallace Hamilton)

That’s what Isaiah envisioned. Imagine how different our world would be if we could convert tanks to tractors, fighter jets to emergency ambulances and guns to musical instruments. All it takes is a little creative hope and a vision of peace. God calls us to hammer away at those parts of our lives which are more like swords than they are plowshares.

A third thing Isaiah also told his listeners is to, *“walk in the light of the LORD”* (v. 5). For me, to walk in the light of the Lord is only possible when I am willing to submit to it; to move out of the darkness of sin. Do we really want peace? Do we really want God to rule and reign—in us? That won’t be possible unless we are willing to give God control of our lives.

The word Advent is derived from the Latin word, “adventure.” To submit to the possibility of a peaceful world is an *adventure*. **It requires surrender.** It is the willingness to walk where we have never walked, the desire to expose ourselves to the grace and truth and presence of God.

Two weeks ago the media made a circus of the brawl that occurred at the end of the Steelers and Browns’ game. A helmet was torn off and used to strike a player on the opposing team. Players were suspended, teams were fined; one Browns player was indefinitely suspended for his behavior. But all the attention was on the players involved. I didn’t hear anyone mention the referees or the security guards or names of players who may have intervened in the melee. Thankfully, there were a few cooler heads who “walked in the light,” keeping the peace and preventing the ruckus from escalating into an all-out war.

Peace is possible when there are those who are willing to “walk in the light,” those who don’t believe violence is the answer to every human conflict, or as a means to an end. God calls us all to be agents of peace, walking in the light, turning our swords into plowshares and following his teachings.

Many of you may enjoy the story of the Nutcracker at Christmas time. I know one little boy who especially likes the scene where the mice battle the rats. Of course it’s only staged violence. It’s only a dream, the dream of a little girl who, for a while, escapes into a world of make believe.

To live in a world of peace may seem like a fantasy to most of us.

Nevertheless, Isaiah says we are to *walk in the light*. As people of faith we are called to try.

So “*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...*” Amen.

(Credit to Dr. Keith Wagner for several sermon ideas)