

## **Isaiah 2: 2-5**

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.

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.

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.

Judgment Pronounced on Arrogance

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

## **Isaiah 9: 2, 6**

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

## **Mark 1: 1-8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

**2** As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

**3** the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’”

**4** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. **8** I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

### **A Formula for Potential Peace**

It is normally fair to assume that there is no formula to achieve life’s deeper purposes. As we consider our four Advent themes, we know that no simple equation will ensure **hope**, no religious rubric will guarantee **peace**, no template will automatically exact **joy**, and no blue print will lead to the construction of **love**. And yet, as we this morning ponder the peace of the season, I will leave us with a mathematical idea that can help us achieve and and promote peace. The violence in our world makes the need for peace a premium. Our journey to the Bethlehem is a journey to the “Prince of Peace.” How is it, that we may map our our steps in the direction of a savior whose salvation is grounded in peace?

...**Let us pray:** As we journey closer to the manger, inspire us, O Lord, open our eyes and ears to truth-telling prophets. May the wisdom they convey, guide us on our footsteps to the baby Jesus. And now, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Isaiah was a person of peace. And his appeal to YHWH's peace was amid a tumultuous time. The Assyrian kingdom posed a significant threat to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. And Israel's Northern Kingdom had been taken into captivity in the Babylonian exile, while the Southern Kingdom struggled mightily with sin and idolatry. And to boot, Babylon was growing in power and looked to pose itself as a long-term threat. The people of Israel were concerned about their present and future. Many wondered what would become of the promises of God in the tempestuous world they lived in. The same wondering that many voice feeling today—some 2700 years later. And yet, in spite of war, conquest, political instability, ethnic tensions, and the displacement of his people, Isaiah, whose name means, "salvation of Yahweh," preached peace.

We hear it in the passage that Arturo read this morning: "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 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." Additionally, the book of Isaiah references, "a perfect peace." It promises of a coming savior who would be a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace.

But it's not just Isaiah. The savior who is to come, has a thing or two to say about peace. Jesus blesses the peacemakers—for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5: 9). Jesus admonishes us to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. He holds that the peace which passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God. He claims the God is our peace and that the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, and peace. In his farewell discourse from John's Gospel, Jesus blesses with the words, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." And the Risen Christ, when first appearing to his disciples, his words are, "Peace be with you."

The Hebrew word Isaiah uses for peace is one you may be familiar with—shalom. The meaning is broad. Shalom can be peace from war, safety, welfare, health, prosperity, quite, tranquility, and a state between friends and even God. So when Isaiah refers to the peace of God, he means all of those things—he means peace from our hearts all of the way to political and social realities.

In Greek, when Jesus says, "peace be with you," eirene, the word carries a similar meaning as its Hebrew counterpart. However, it also infers, "the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot," (Strong's lexicon).

Thus when Isaiah and Jesus proclaim peace, whether in the heart of the person trying to be faithful to God, the face of international discontent, or even the agony of the cross, they mean a holistic peace that includes

our inner souls, our relationships with those in our communities, and peace between nations.

That is a tall order! That kind of peace may seem “pie in the sky.” Christian doctrine, especially in our Reformed tradition has a history of recognizing our propensity to turn away from God and sow brokenness. History books and the histories that doesn’t make it into books, contain bloodshed and conflict going all the way back to Cain slaying his brother Able. Is preaching peace, pushing for peace, and praying for peace, even worth the effort?

According to the *The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, as it states, in relation to Isaiah’s prophecy of peace, “Here is a conviction born of Isaiah’s reading of the mind of God, that there shall yet be a day when [hu]mankind shall live together and walk together in faith and righteousness and brother [and sister]hood. How desperately the world needs such a faith! Without its inspiration and its power to sustain our search for a way of peace, we are condemned to the dreadful prospect of wars succeeding wars until the human race destroys itself. We have, in each generation the strange, tragic spectacle with people endowed with genius, yet wholly unable to learn the art of living together in peace,” (Volume 5, Pg. 180). Our quest for peace must begin here. If any peace will prevail, it has to begin in the hearts of individuals. Because the actions of the world, are always expressions of what is happening in the hearts of people. Our other prophet of the day, John the Baptist, is one who has a specific prophecy that speaks about right here. It is his mantra. He shouted it ad nauseam throughout the Galilean countryside: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is

near.” Repent, turn from that which is destructive to the soul and to others, and allow God’s love, mercy, and grace to fill your heart. We have to repent and make peace in here for there to be peace out there. And when we do, we can become what Jesus calls, “peacemakers.” “Blessed are the peacemakers.” In Christ, we are called to peace—and not an easy peace. Evil, envy, anger, and violence, that is the impulsive way—the “easier way.” Cultivating peace takes effort, focus, and faith. It is easier to tear something down than it is to build something up.

It is Christ’s way. And faithfulness to that way makes a difference in the world. There are more high profile peace makers who have taken their call to heart. Think Mahatma Gandhi who quipped, “I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.” Think Martin Luther King Jr. who said, “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.” Think Nelson Mandela, who believed, “If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.” Think about Jesus, who when Judas betrayed him, turning him over to the soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees, and “Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear... <sup>11</sup>Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?’” Jesus’ mission was not to start an insurrection, but rather to conquer evil, and violence and with divine love.

As we journey to the manger, that too is our call. Swords are to be turned to plowshares—spears into pruning hooks. How can we bring peace to the world around us? How can we come to terms with our own darkness and allow Christ bring peace to our hearts? How can we find peace in our hectic and frenetic lives? When we are in a position to make a difference, in a relationship, with family members, with neighbors, in our church, in our communities and in our world, how can we translate the peace in our hearts to the world? That is our task as peacemakers. Does it seem difficult—nearly impossible? Yes. Should we abandon a dream of peace that Isaiah prophecies? Jesus didn't, so neither should we.

A friend of this congregation and a long-time leader in our presbytery sent a text yesterday with words emanating from her faith which is based in peace. She walks the line of a holistic peace amid violence and anger. Her words represent steps toward Bethlehem, in spite of debilitating violence. They model a commitment to Isaiah's message of peace, and to Jesus' divine peace mission. I asked Maribeth Culpepper, a long-time member of the Aztec community and the Presbyterian Church in Aztec, what could Second Church pray for, in light of the shooting. Her response, "Prayers for the family of the shooter. They are being treated terribly in the news. Prayers for the family of the two students killed. Prayers of thanksgiving for the custodian Emory Hill who went to Aztec High School and has been there many many years, he's the one who ran down the hall after the shooter and yelling into his walkie-talkie 'there's an active shooter go on lock down.' He saved so many lives and the courageousness of this man who became a first-time father six weeks ago is just unbelievable.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the way the community has come together and for the quick reaction of our law enforcement. Prayers for forgiveness and grace in the hearts of all touched by this tragedy.”

“The ultimate weakness of violence,” writes Dr. King, “is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” That pretty much sums up our mission. As Jesus commands, “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.” I began suggesting there was a helpful formula for peace.

It dawned on me early in the week while helping Carlos with his homework. His assignment focused on potential energy—the notion from physics of the energy possessed by an object because of its position relative to other objects, stresses within itself, its electric charge, or other factors energy. An example of potential energy is a car parked on the top of a hill or a rock on the edge of a cliff. If a force nudges either one, with gravity, the car or the rock will move and a lot of stored energy will be released. Each one of us has a lot of potential, as miss Susie reminds us. But each one of us

has a lot of potential energy. How do harness it properly.? We have potential rage energy and ego energy that can be released when triggered by violence. But, in Jesus Christ, we have potential peace energy. If triggered by a prophet, a savior, or divine love or any form, we can release peace energy. This leads to praying for our enemies, restoring brokenness, and triggering peace in others. That is the perfect peace of God—a peace that will help sustain us and the world, until Christ comes again.

In the name of the Father,  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.