

A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, December 2, 2007, Advent I, dedicated to the memory of Bill Willis, Sr. and to all who have died of AIDS, those who minister to them including Dorcas M. Campbell, to all who are still living with HIV/AIDS and always to the glory of God!

“Learning War No More”

***Part I of VII: “The Vision of Isaiah:
Welcome the Messiah!”
Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44***

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent means “New Beginnings.” Today, we have lit the candle of Hope and so we enter this season hopeful of his return. Earlier in the newsletter, I wrote that our Advent texts point in Hebrew Scriptures to the First Coming of our Savior while our Gospel texts point to His return - the Second Coming. Throughout the next four Sundays, the vision of the Prophet Isaiah will point to the anticipated arrival of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today, with the stage set for Amahl, I would like to do something completely different. I would like to present in a “first person” voice. The first vision of Isaiah points to a world without war.

+++++

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

+++++

I am Isaiah - the Royal Prophet. I was so named because I came from a royal family. Uzziah, the great King of Judah, was my first cousin. His father, Amaziah, and my father, Amoz, were brothers. Looking back more than 2,700 years, I could have become King of Judah! Instead, God chose me to be a prophet.

You might ask how could anyone raised in a palace be a good prophet? How could one accustomed to luxury and wealth be the spokesman of God? I say to you - your background need not matter! If God calls you to prophecy deliverance; if God calls you prophecy hope; if God calls you to proclaim the coming of the Messiah - it is your job to follow and obey! God used my poetic creativity and prophetic imagination to serve God's purposes. What an honor to sit at the feet of the king and then witness to the vision and power of God to influence all lives, all kingdoms and to rule the universe!

I began my Book of prophecies with these words: ***“The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw for Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah . . . ”*** Prophecy is about God's vision. Prophecy is what God envisions through you. It's about hope! It's about belief is God's vision for something greater than you and all the levels of life around you.

So, what vision has God given you? What do you believe in? What can your imagination create about this church? This community? This city? This nation and hemisphere and global community? This universe? To live only in the moment is to miss God's great calling to see a future unfolding which will be different from a past which was limited by a lack of prophetic imagination!

In the second chapter of my prophecy I had a vision of a world without war. On the highest mountain of God, a vision came to me. It was a vision of peace in Zion - God's Holy City - Jerusalem. God would be the judge of nations. No longer would people fight. No longer would they be at war. They would beat their swords into plowshares. They would turn their spears into pruning hooks. Never again would they lift-up their swords against each other. People everywhere would learn war - NO MORE! The house of Jacob would walk in the light of God!

Can you imagine a world without war? How would it feel to awaken each morning with no threat of warfare? Imagine this. You

would awaken with trust in God and in your fellow human beings. Imagine your nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction - gone. Imagine the trillions of dollars spent on making weapons and hosting armies of war and how those dollars and those creative leaders could transform education, health care, housing and a new job market with peace as its highest value. Imagine if our national war machine stopped running and the development of weapon systems ceased to exist. That is what beating swords into plowshares would look like.

We would battle homelessness instead of creating homeless refugees of war. We would battle illiteracy and ignorance rather than deepening our own ignorance of other cultures, nations and languages. On this World AIDS Sunday, imagine if HIV/AIDS was attacked like the enemy of humanity that it is - having claimed 30 million lives in only 30 plus years. Many of you have never known a world without AIDS. Now the eradication of AIDS would be the focus of our warfare - like polio was to past generations. To do battle with disease instead living with a disease called battling our sisters and brothers? Now that would reflect God's love and light on this earth more than we will ever know.

My visions of a healthier and nonviolent world were given as gifts by God to my people who were at war with the Philistines, the Moabites and the Syrians. They weren't dreams of a crazy dreamer! They were God's word of hope in a war-torn world.

How would we do this? How would we walk in the light of the Lord and study war no more? You are asking me! You have got to be kidding! You have Jesus as your Savior! You have the word of God through the Prince of Peace as your instruction manual! Read what he tells you! Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek. Have no hate in your heart for any person! His Word in the Gospels is filled with nonviolent teaching and principles of hope! Read it! Live it! Change!

Later, I wrote of your Messiah - *“A shoot will come out of the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots. Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, and knowledge will be his guiding light”* (based on Isaiah 11:1ff). I said of him, *“He will open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf, the lame shall leap, the speechless sing for joy”* (Is. 35:1ff). I said of him, *“A young woman shall bear a son and his name shall be Immanuel - which means “God with us”* (Is. 7:14). I said of him, *“For a child has been born for us, a son has been given to us. Authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom and he shall uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The ZEAL of the Lord of hosts will do this”* (Is. 9:6-7).

I delivered all these prophecies hundreds of years before he came, before he ever spoke a word, before he transformed lives and this world with justice and righteousness. If I could see this without ever having met him, why are you so silent and timid about living his vision of peace and justice when you claim him as your Savior every day? I don't get it!

I was a prophet for 59 years. For all those years I longed for the day when I would see the Messiah and my heart would dance with delight and joy. You are so blessed. You have been given his vision for your world. Become the peacemakers he called you to be. Stop this war. Stop all wars. Learn peace. Live peace. Teach peace. That's what your Messiah wants you to do! I have no doubt about this. Amen.