

A sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Janine Wilson, Associate Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, the First Sunday of Advent, Reign of Christ, December 1, 2013, dedicated to Sondra Geronimo and Sarah Reed – women of gentle countenance and peace and always to the glory of God!

**“War No More –
Can you see it!”
Isaiah 2:1-5**

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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

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The prophet Isaiah has his own brand of prophecy. He didn't waste time with casual endeavors. He worked for change in the root cause of things – not just their effects. As great as it is to feed people, you wouldn't find him at the local soup kitchen. You would find him at city hall – working to eliminate the need for soup kitchens, as well as weapons of destruction of self and others. He was an advocate for God's policies and he was willing to risk everything to stand up against the independence of Hezekiah, Uzziah and Jotham. In scripture and history, he is a voice of change, challenged by God to capture the full attention of people. At one point, in the beginning of Chapter 20, God goes so far as to call on him to take off his sandals and clothes and run naked, literally or figuratively, through the streets as a warning sign to Egypt and Ethiopia. But this morning, he keeps his clothes on. Today his job is to participate in the reign of Ahaz and to secure the future of Jerusalem.

The *first* Chapter of Isaiah is filled with unfaithfulness, violence, desolation, and trampling on the poor. God is watching and tugs at the hem of their garments to try to stop the insanity. For a blink in time, it seems there like there is a hint of hope, but by Chapter 2 things have already fallen apart. So God takes up the call again, ‘in the days to come’, and tells them to listen for what the prophet Isaiah *saw* regarding Judah and Jerusalem. Eugene Peterson tells it this way:

“There’s a day coming
when the mountain of GOD’s House
will be The Mountain—
solid, towering over all mountains.
All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.
They’ll say, “Come,
let’s climb GOD’s Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.
He’ll show us the way he works
so we can live the way we’re made.”
Zion’s the source of the revelation.
GOD’s Message comes from Jerusalem.
He’ll settle things fairly between nations.
He’ll make things right between many peoples.
They’ll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.
No more will nation fight nation;
they won’t play war anymore.
Come, family of Jacob,
let’s live in the light of GOD.) *i*

He has us from the start – “*The word that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*” (Isaiah 2:1) He is the prophet – he SEE’S things – from the inside out – he sees the heart of things. You and I read all the time. We take books from shelves and read them. We open iPad’s to the daily news, and read. Our smart phones buzz in pockets and call us “read the messages,” and if we don’t, they buzz and annoy us until we give in and read them. But not Isaiah –

he sees the heart of God! It wasn't a time or place for reading all the time the way we do – so God helped him to SEE.

God painted Isaiah a picture. So this morning, let's listen and imagine the vision Joyce Kilmer saw looking out across the beauty of North Carolina – “I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree...”ⁱⁱ, and what Ansel Adams ⁱⁱⁱ felt with Bridalveil Fall thundering as it cascaded down in front of him. What do we see as our world totters on the edge of survival? How are we to deal with all of the voices that scream at us? Like our predecessors in the time of Isaiah, every voice claims to be the one that matters. The noise gets so loud we can hardly hear ourselves think. It's imperative we choose our authorities with care. We are at living at the edge of war within us and around us.

Margaret MacMillan, warden of St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford and award-winning historian and author, has a new book coming out – The War That Ended Peace. ^{iv} Her former book addressed World War I, this one takes a deeper look at the intersection of the great forces in society and the individuals who make decisions to stop or go forward - with war. In the process she looks at the economies, social structures, ideologies and the decisions that lead to saying 'yes' or 'no'. What did the decision makers see or not see before their 'yes' and 'no' to war? On the one hand, it sounds easy and on the other, impossible. But there is more, of course, to it. What we see is usually filtered through others... and what they want us to see. War takes public opinion to make it or break it up before it begins.

So let us consider what starts wars. There are wars that focus on religion – mine is right and yours, being different, must be wrong; and ethnic cleansing, which matches the same as mine is right and yours is wrong. Other war starters include revenge and personal gain. If I think you might lose and I might win, then maybe it's worth the battle, if not, I'd better think it through a little longer. My grandmother used to call this way of sorting things - 'tit' for 'tat' and teachers on the playground of first graders call it 'push' and 'shove'. In fact, if we reduce many of the characteristics and root causes of

war down to the age of 5, 6 and 7 year olds, I think we'd come close to reality.

- I want it, therefore it's ok to take it.
- It may be yours, but you put it down for ten seconds and the ten second rule wins, so now it's mine.
- My brother is bigger than your brother and he said it's mine, so it's mine.

(I could continue, but I'll give us all a break, I'm already stepping on Robert Fulghum's toes.)

The hope of Isaiah is for us to see things in a different light, to see what is and what can be in light of the Divine. Everything might have belonged to others yesterday, but now, now we are called to be Yahweh's own. Arrogance, pride and loftiness over others are done. Riches and special privileges are worthless. Power is seated at the right hand of God, not in a fancy-painted, armored SUV. Just as Israel's lifestyle had become self-centered and self-serving, we stand at the crossroad... with degradation and humiliation on one side of the intersection and humility and grace on the other. Isaiah calls us to cross the highway and join him - turning weapons of war into shovels and hoes for planting and building up all of God's children. Can you see it?

I know it's a very big task. I have no illusion. I do not think any single person here will change the world, even though I know you are all wonderful. I *do* believe - together we can make a difference. I *do* believe humility, hope, and hard work are contagious. This is both a statement of faith and a statement of math. What we do, how we act, what we envision, gets passed forward every time. It's the reminder of what happens when someone has a bad day at work, grouches at the person meeting them at the door at home, followed by someone kicking the dog and the dog bites the toddler. The reverse is even more powerful. One grace-filled action, passed forward to travel forward with speed and joy.

So let me ask you, what is one thing in your life that you are willing, and with God's help able, to give up to God? What does it look like now? What will we see when you make the change for God's

peace? I don't know your sword and I don't know your plowshare, but maybe these can get you started... if you are open to seeing things in a new way.

- Are you willing to give up slamming the ideas of 'the other side' and spouting about what you think America needs and deserves... and replace it with a 30 second breath prayer asking God what God hopes for *all* countries and the planet – then share what you saw in your prayer?
- Are you willing to set aside your lingering tugs of bigotry and replace them with God's generous welcome to all people – especially to those who look and sound different than you do? What will it sound like?
- Are you willing to conserve the planet, not just by reducing the number of plastic bottles you drink from or the paper you don't recycle, but also learning more and participating in clean water initiatives around the world...including here in Columbus, Ohio? Who else will be blessed at the fountain of God's love?
- Are you open to practicing humility...not taking credit for something you said and did, even if it was great and wonderful... and replace pride with a prayer giving thanks to God instead?
- Are you willing to "Protect Children, Not Guns" and seek out ways to preserve God's hope for the innocents of our nation and the world? Then, look with your heart and see the leaders of the future – the children grown to be makers of peace, not war!

Isaiah is calling us today - to turn the weapons of war: hunger, thirst, fear, isolation, arrogance, pride and power over others - into shovels and hoes – against all the odds. When we step up to our fullest potential, God will see a world of difference...

O Come, Emanuel... May your peace be upon the earth this day and forever, amen.

To God be all glory this day and forevermore,
Reverend Dr. Janine Wilson

i <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+2%3A1-5&version=MSG>

ii <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/joyce-kilmer>

iii <http://www.anseladams.com/>

iv <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/historian-margaret-macmillan-on-what-the-war-to-end-wars-can-teach-us/article14174144/?page=3>

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