A.M.D.G. Advent 1- A Text: Isaiah 2: 1-5

 November 27, 2016

**Isaiah 2: 1-5** 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 ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

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

**Hope – Light In The Darkness**

Happy New Year! Today, churches all around the world begin a new church year by ushering in Advent – a time of preparing ourselves once again to experience the birth of Christ in our hearts and souls – a time of Hope for the reign of God to come anew in the midst of the chaos, the conflict and injustice of our world – a time of waiting for the Sacred to break into the ordinary once again as it did that Christmas over 2,000 years ago.

But despite the cheerful Christmas carols, bright lights and decorations that have been adorning the stores now for over a month – in the context of all that is going on in our world – and perhaps in our lives – the cheerfulness of this time leading up to Christmas sounds a bit forced - and the contrast between the fa-la-las and the cries of many who are in the midst of poverty, war, and uncertainty seem a bit startling.

Even our scripture reading today seems a bit disconnected with reality – a vision of nations coming together in peace: “*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall they learn war any more.”*

More than 500 years before the time of Jesus, even the people of Israel listened to Isaiah's dream, this vision of the future – of the possible - and then they looked around them at their once-beautiful city, Jerusalem - burned and battered by powers that must have appeared unstoppable. And they, too, wondered.

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The great biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, has compared this week's beautiful passage from the prophet Isaiah to the "I have a dream" speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But, unfortunately - most days our lived reality is still a long, long way from either prophet's vision of healing, justice, and peace.

This year, we close our eyes and listen to the words of this dream of peace and harmony from Isaiah with heavy hearts, thinking of the conflicts and war that flare and threaten to flare all over the world - in Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Central America - and in our cities and neighborhoods, as well, our homes and workplaces, and our relationships with one another.

We've come to understand the absence of peace in other ways, too: in the threat of terrorism that makes even "peaceful" days feel ominous and "secure" places unsafe, in the growing anger of the dispossessed and disadvantaged that threatens to explode, in the damage to the earth that we will leave as a tragic legacy to our grandchildren. Melting glaciers, superstorms, masses of plastic in the ocean and earthquakes in New Zealand and other places, animal species facing extinction: we have to wonder if nature itself is at war with us--not that we could blame it if it were.  Climate change and environmental destruction are facts of our lives – despite the claim of some that it is all a hoax or fear-mongering.

With our hearts heavy, then, with the fears and the suffering of our lives and our world – how then, are we to step into these Advent days? How are we to sing our ‘Joy To The World’s? Where do we find the holy in the midst of the mess? And where is the hope that will light our way in the darkness?

It is the question that is asked in a contemporary and somewhat edgy video I came across about a month ago as I was preparing to sit down with the Worship Committee to plan for our Advent and Christmas Season. It is a spoken-word poem that is called ‘Brave Advent Lament’ which I’d like to share with you this morning.

I warn you – it is not always easy to listen to – both from the perspective that the 2 women speak quickly – but also because it raises uncomfortable questions.I copied out the text of the words as I best I could for you – so that you can understand more of what is being said.

***video***

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Our Advent season begins – in the very midst of the mess in which our world exists - with the proclamation of what, given our current context seems *impossible*: nations coming together, and all creation working in harmony for justice and peace and wholeness. But as our video today reminds us - Christmas is *about* the impossible.

500 years after the words of Isaiah were spoken, a young woman heard the promise reiterated: “*Nothing will be impossible with God.”* And Jesus the Christ – the Hope of God – was born into the world – a light to shine the way in the darkness.

So – encompassed by the vision from Isaiah and in the words of our video: “*Take* ***that*** *hopelessness, take* ***that*** *misery, take* ***that*** *despair, because Christmas is an insurrection and a resurrection. Because this Christmas, Jesus is not just the baby. He is the radical revolutionary who came to do the saving, who spoke uncomfortable truth to the narrow-minded religious, who turned over tables for justice, who used his voice to speak for children, orphans, widows - who became freedom for the oppressed.*

*Yes – he wanted us to know peace so badly that he sacrificed himself so that we could realize we are not US vs THEM. We are US with HIM. He is Emmanuel – who is God with us – saving us from us – so that we can be rebirthed, revived, renamed, and reborn. God is with us – God is for us – God forgives us, redeems us, accepts us – God enfolds us, God emboldens us. God is with us and God stays with us – us who want to walk and serve like him, fight injustice and poverty with him.*

*So this Advent - let’s do what we hear the angels singing: Glory in the highest running down to meet the lowest; let every heart prepare him room; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found; his law is love and his gospel is peace; in excelsis deo. Let us sing for love, for peace, for goodwill for all humanity. Let us extend our hands, and lift our voices till our lives shout out aloud “Merry Christmas” .*

And the people said: **Amen!**