

October 3, 2021

Isaiah 2:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

**“Seeking Peace at All Times in All Ways”**

For a few moments I'd like you to imagine with me a prophet standing in the center of the chancel where Janelle is singing this morning, in that glowing light that makes the front of this sanctuary so lovely.

**The prophet begins to sing about a holy mountain where God resides.**

Through the verses the prophet sings about peoples from many nations streaming to this holy mountain to hear Divine instruction, to seek and receive justice, and to make peace with one another.

As the song ends, imagine with me the sound of hammering upon metal as weapons created to kill are repurposed into tools to nourish and sustain life.

Imagine with me the new multicultural, multiracial, multilingual community of nations going back out into the world encouraging and supporting one another in living out the teachings, the justice, and the peace they have received.

**It's a beautiful and radical and seemingly impossible dream, isn't it?**

We know the prophet's vision bears little resemblance to our present-day realities.

We continue to be disappointed by decades of failed peace initiatives between Israel and Palestine.

We're concerned about the ongoing tensions between our country and China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia.

We're embarrassed by the vengeful wars we initiated in Iraq and Afghanistan followed by our recent abandonment of the latter's people, along with the humanitarian disaster on our own southern border.

Never mind the divisions here at home over racial justice, control over women's bodies, vaccines, mask mandates, sore loser politicians, and hardline stances between and within the political parties over two pieces of potentially lifegiving physical and social infrastructure legislation.

Of course, Isaiah's peaceful Realm oracle bore little resemblance to life in Judah and Jerusalem either.

**His audience may well have laughed out loud at the naiveté of his vision.**

For centuries, ancient Judah had existed at the crossroads between Egypt and various eastern empires that emerged in Mesopotamia and Persia.

Although Judah didn't itself have a powerful military, battles were often fought across this tiny nation, making life precarious.

Peace was something people longed for as they lived with the ever-present possibility that competing empires' armies could come marching through Judah at any time, trampling across and helping themselves to their crops, homes, and family members along with their loved ones getting killed in the crossfire.

People hoped that peace between its large and powerful neighbors might also help little Judah to survive intact.

Some of the people thought one way to keep the peace was by adopting the religions of its more powerful neighbors.

Isaiah was sent to Judah and Jerusalem with his prophecies and visions in part to challenge that idea by reminding the people that although their nation was tiny that their God isn't a small territorial deity.

Their God is instead One who sits on the highest mountain, the One to whom all the nations – Jews and Gentiles – will someday come seeking wisdom and justice, and who will then choose to live together in peace.

Although the **“days to come”** is vague, it implies that the prophet’s vision will become reality within history.

In the meantime, the prophet’s oracle ends with an invitation to *“come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”*

Come, let us go ahead and begin seeking wisdom and justice, and choosing to live together in peace.

This year’s Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) World Communion Sunday resources echoes that invitation by stating:

***“Peace is active, not passive. Peace is doing, not waiting.”***

With Isaiah’s vision of the Holy One judging between the nations and arbitrating for many peoples, the prophet reminded his people that there is no true peace without justice.

**Protestors chanting *“no justice, no peace”* recognize this truth.**

When we march and raise our voices, when we express our views to our lawmakers, and when we vote our beliefs at the ballot box, we are actively participating in seeking a peace that is active, not passive, a peace that is doing, not waiting.

The first verse of our second Scripture reading this morning provides the theme for this World Communion Sunday message:

***“May the God of peace ... grant you peace at all times in all ways.”***

All things considered this was a daring prayer for the Apostle Paul to ask the Thessalonian Christians to pray.

Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonian church arrived during a time when the Christian community was experiencing persecutions so severe that some hoped for and may have been praying for the time of Divine judgment to come.

Others took advantage of their fear and oppression, spreading misinformation and sowing dissent among people still new to the Christian faith.

Yet Paul's letter ends with a blessing asking God to grant the people the gift of peace at all times in all ways.

One of the anonymous PC(USA) reflections notes that *"It might have been daring enough to consider asking them to imagine peace at 'any time,' much less at 'all times,' or to imagine peace in some sort of way at all, much less in all of them."*

Although most of us have not had the experience of being persecuted for our Christian faith like the Thessalonians nor of living in a nation regularly overrun by warring invaders like Judah and Israel, I imagine many of us have had times besides this ongoing global pandemic when we've struggled to feel God's peace actively present in our lives.

That's part of why seeking peace at all times and in all ways may indeed feel like a daring, even a foolish prayer.

Yet on this World Communion Sunday, as we celebrate Jesus' meal of remembrance with Christian siblings around the globe, we're reminded that he taught the peoples who streamed to and followed him up God's mountain and other places, that he arbitrated among his disciples and others, and that even when righteously angry he modeled God's love, justice and peace.

We remember and celebrate that not only Jews but also Gentiles sought Jesus' teachings and healings, and not only followed but became his evangelists expressing God's love and justice out in their corners of the wider world.

Because they did so, we celebrate that from many places, peoples, languages, and cultures around the globe we are spiritually all together sharing Jesus' meal of remembrance around a Table of Holy Communion.

And we celebrate that our Creator provides what we need to continue the mission and ministry of building God's Realm on earth as in heaven, with actively serving peacemakers here at home and around the world.

The prophet Isaiah received a vision of peoples streaming to God to learn, for judgment and arbitration followed by a new multicultural, multiracial, multilingual community of nations going back out into the world encouraging and supporting one another in living out the teachings, the justice, and the peace they have received.

Both seeking and extending the peace of Christ is part of an active, engaged faith – a witness to what it means for us to be the Church, together.

***“May the God of peace ... grant you peace at all times in all ways.”***

Amen.