

December 6, 2015
In Days to Come
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Isaiah 2:1-4

[The Future House of God]

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.

A few days after the Paris attacks Pope Francis said in a sermon, "*the church is decked out for Christmas in tinsel and lights and yet the whole world is at war. Wars for which there is no justification. God weeps. Jesus weeps.*" And so it has always been.

Chapter Two of Isaiah cannot be read apart from Chapter One, any more than we can gather here and pretend the world is not at war or that children in our own town don't go to sleep homeless and hungry. Chapter Two is Christmas -- the world we celebrate and long for. Chapter One is the world we live in, steeped in human sin and brokenness.

Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly... [Isaiah 1:4a]

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good;

seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. [Isaiah 1:15-17]

How the faithful city has become a _____ [whore]. She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her— but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them. [Isaiah 1:21-23]

It could be the news of any given modern day. The prophet has a long and difficult tale to tell his congregation, promising them where their disobedience and fear is taking them: the tale of their God who, in spite of his anger, has no intention of forsaking them.

With Chapter Two the prophet sets out the promise of their redemption. *“In the days to come,”* he says. But far-off days they were: beyond the lifetime of the prophet, beyond the lifetimes of anyone hearing his voice, and others -- ages and ages of others. Some are still waiting. Some days even **I am waiting (and I get paid to believe that *the days to come* which Isaiah preached are days which have come and gone!): the incarnation and the resurrection; the prince of peace come to earth to settle the cosmic war with evil, putting death to death, so that I have no fight left to fight with anyone, only life to live, grace to give and to receive, and peace to enjoy forevermore.**

I'm supposed to believe that this life of mine, that our life together, is the aftermath of Isaiah, Chapter Two. But if I am not prayed up, if I am too busy or too angry or too hungry -- or too worried or too tired or too tuned in to the news and too tuned out of the Word -- if I'm too much of any of that, I'll get sideways in the world and start believing crazy stuff, like “Congress can accomplish things” or “the NRA is the problem,” instead of, friends, . . .what? What is the problem?

The problem isn't that this world isn't working. Of course it isn't working. Jesus came because it doesn't work, has never worked. Its princes are rebels and companions of thieves. They love bribes and run after gifts. They do not defend the orphan or the widow's cause.

The problem isn't the world. The problem is me, us, our preference for being sideways and confused rather than being useful and on point. The problem is a

timid, fearful church compromised by our own affluence and comfort, satisfied to help the needy -- so long as it doesn't cost us too much.

It's advent -- time for reflection, for preparation. So let's reflect: when did I last truly sacrifice anything? when did I last give up what I needed so someone else had what *they* needed? when was I last truly generous? when did I give away enough to pinch my own standard of living? when was I last truly brave? when did I last risk my own reputation, my position, or my well-being in defense of another person's reputation or well-being? when did I risk anything at all for the purpose of justice? for kindness?

The Isaiah Chapter Two world, where all kinds of folks worship God together, where swords get beaten into plowshares, and people grow food instead of making war, that's not on the world, friends. That's on the church, on us, the ones who claim to believe the day of redemption has come and gone. It's on us to make it the world that is, and not the world we simply dream about and pray for.

God has done God's part. God has armed us fully, *with every grace endued*, remember?

Isaiah describes the world as it is and, in his next verse, as it shall be; the world we believe to have already come to pass in Christ Jesus, the world that *is*, here and now -- *and not yet*, which shall come more and more into the present, as we have the faith to make it so.

We have been a faithful church. We have done hard things, taken risks. In the new year, I'll ask you to be more faithful yet, more generous yet. And we will be, or not -- for no other reason than we decide to or not; than we decide to trust that what we have -- ALL that we have -- belongs to the Lord, and we are called to do HIS will, in this time and place.

For now, it's Christmas, when we mark the birth of our Savior into a world as cruel and murderous now as it was when he first came. And where, through His church, Jesus can still be as generous and helpful and strong and determined as ever, to make this world his world, for everyone.

Would you pray with me?