

“Up to Restoration”

Advent 2022 – “The Hope of the Prophets” – part #1

Resource from umcdiscipleship.org

Isaiah 2:1-5

[Title slide] Good morning, friends. Today is the first Sunday in Advent, a season of expectation and prophecy. We can actually tell each other, “Happy New Year!” today, because in the Christian Church, this is a time of new beginnings for us. We know Christmas is around the corner, but Advent is a special season of its own. We expect the return of Jesus, even as we retell the story of his birth. We expect God to show up in a new way, even as we reclaim the traditions of the holiday season. We rekindle our hope as we decorate the tree and light the candles. Each year, Advent is a reminder that God is not done with us yet, and so we wait for Jesus with the expectation that God will change us. If you are in need hope and restoration this morning, you are in the right place. Please join me in an attitude of prayer.

O God, today we long for you to show up. We long for you to put an end to war and strife, to destruction and poverty. We long for an end to sin and death. We believe you sent the Savior, Jesus, to this world to bring peace and justice. Help us to fulfill our role in seeing your kingdom come. Take this day, this moment, to teach us to listen to the prophets as we expect the return of Christ. We ask this in his name. Amen.

[Globe] If you could change one thing in the world right now, what would it be? (Allow time for answers.) I think one thing the world needs right now is the end of violence. Recent news has once again highlighted the terrible acts of murder committed in our society in Virginia and Colorado, not withstanding the war that continues in Ukraine. According to Forbes, there have been 611 mass shootings so far this year just in the United States. That is the second worst total in the past decade.¹

The world needs hope. The world needs justice. The world needs restoration. Frankly, the world needs Jesus.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianbushard/2022/11/25/611-mass-shootings-recorded-so-far-in-2022-second-worst-year-for-gun-violence-in-almost-a-decade/?sh=51ef88a3152c>

[Weapons to art] I found a news article this past week that gave me some hope. It is about one artist who is doing something positive about gun violence.²

Surrendered weapons melted, turned into art

By Parker Collins Los Angeles, May. 26, 2021

LOS ANGELES — California law states that guns taken by the sheriff's department have to be destroyed, but that doesn't necessarily mean they end up in the garbage. Metallurgist Landon Ryan owns MFA Foundry, where he's turning weapons into sculptures....Artists pay Ryan to bring their ideas to life.

Artist, Lin Evola, aims to create 12 angel sculptures and a 64-foot monument in downtown Los Angeles. It'll take time to gather all the necessary materials because every piece is made from melted weapons. "I cannot even express to you in words how it feels. I am grateful every time I see death turned into life," Evola said. In the batch melted down in May, there were about 30 handguns all from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. They were either involved in a crime or surrendered.

That's the kind of story that warms your heart and gives you hope. Something good can come out of tragedy. Creativity emerges from despair because someone has a vision.

[Night sky] Christmas is a natural time of year for people to think about peace and hope. We long for something positive as the days grow colder and darker. In fact, the real reason Christmas became a Christian holiday was not because Jesus was born in December, but because the Church wanted to have a holiday on or near the winter solstice. Jesus is the Light of the world; it seemed appropriate to celebrate his birth in the winter. And as an added bonus, New Year's falls right afterwards, meaning Christmas can literally be a new beginning for us.

The desire for light in darkness, hope in despair, peace in war, turning weapons into art; none of this is new to our time. Isaiah records the hope of the people hundreds of years before Christ.

² <https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/arts/2021/05/26/surrendered-weapons-melted--turned-into-art>

[Scroll] So who was Isaiah? He was one of the greatest prophets of Israel, an advisor to the king. Isaiah wrote his prophecy over 600 years before Christ was born. One might ask, why does the book of Isaiah matter to us now? For one thing, many of his prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus, including: the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14); the rise of the branch of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1); the reign of the Son of David (Isaiah 9:7). Most importantly, Isaiah gave us the Easter prophecies – the suffering servant dying and yet returning to life (Isaiah 53). Isaiah foretold the Savior. That’s huge. Fulfilled prophecy is foundational to our faith.

[Scripture] This particular prophecy in Isaiah 2 – this vision of God’s reign on the mountain – speaks to the hope we have for the world now. Isaiah saw something in “the last days.” Many of us believe we are living in the last days. I’m not saying that the world will end tomorrow, but our own observations tell us humanity is in bad shape. There is poverty, pollution, and political turmoil. We all see it. We all feel it. Someone may ask us, what right do we have to celebrate Christmas when the world is in such bad shape?

We have every right. We are first and foremost a people of hope. The world has plenty of cynics already. We need more joy. And Isaiah gives us a taste through the vision he saw.

[Mountain] This vision starts with people ascending a mountain. Now, I like to climb mountains. I love taking in a great view. It is a challenge to climb up, literally and figuratively. Climbing out of despair is similar to ascending a mountain. It does not come naturally, but by choice.

Isaiah hears the people saying, “Let’s go up.” The people encourage each other. Their goal is Mt. Zion, Jerusalem, the city of peace. The peak of that mountain is God’s home on earth, the temple.

[Temple Mount] Temple Mount in Jerusalem is an interesting place, but it’s not all that high. It’s only 2,428 feet above sea level. The bottom of the Kidron Valley below is only about 300 feet lower. That’s not a great height by our standards, but even in the U.P., a steep slope of 300 feet will take your breath away. The temple was on a hill. The reality for the Isaiah’s people way, no matter what direction you were traveling, you had to climb to get to the temple.

[People in a crowd] These people choose to go up to worship. Up to restoration. Isaiah sees all the people, every nation, coming together. And this is way better than the World Cup Tournament. The people encourage each other. They want to hear God’s voice and learn God’s law. Did you know that God’s law is actually good for you? The Bible, God’s love letter to you, actually has useful instruction to guide your life! Isaiah sees that the people desire God’s law, God’s justice. It’s like they had enough of the world’s lies and misinformation. They want truth, God’s truth.

[NYC statue] So what does God do for them? God judges. The justice and peace God dishes out is so powerful, they turn their weapons into farming tools, swords into plow points, spears into pruning hooks. Just like turning handguns into angel statues, something good comes out of something deadly.

Wouldn’t it be great to see “nation not take up sword against nation, nor train for war anymore”? (Isaiah 2:4) What if the worst conflicts we witnessed were just on the field during the World Cup or Olympics? That’s what Isaiah saw, but it only came about because the people sought out God.

[Title slide] Someone might say, “Sure, Pastor, but this is not the reality we experience now. How does Isaiah or Advent or Christmas change the world?” Let me borrow a response to that question from Pastor Derek Webber on umcdiscipleship.org:

[The joy of Advent] is not a blind joy or a joy that neglects the brokenness and the need that surrounds us. If anything, it opens our eyes to what is really happening in the world and in us. It calls us back to a sense of watchful waiting for signs of God’s kingdom breaking out in surprising places, at unexpected times, among people we might not have chosen. Our worship then turns us outward this season.³

The focus of Isaiah is to reach the mountain where God is, not just to be there, but to learn from God. To let God be the judge. To understand God’s law, his word. In response to learning, obeying, and living God’s word, anger and war

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/an-advent-song-of-ascents/first-sunday-of-advent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes>

disappear. Weapons are remade into farming tools, made for creating and sustaining, not killing. That is the hope of the prophets, and that can be our hope, too.

[Christmas tree] So, what do you hope for this Christmas? A big present under the tree? Some expensive gift? Those things are nice but not eternal. Advent is our time to remind ourselves that peace on earth is a goal we can actually work towards. As the song says, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

[Prince of Peace] Isaiah called Jesus the “Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Jesus can be your Prince of Peace, too. He can bring his presence – P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E – into your life through a simple prayer. If you are longing for peace and restoration in your life, look up. Climb the mountain of faith, leave the valley of doubt and despair. Remember John 3:16-17: God loved the world – and that includes you – so much, God sent his only son, that whomever believes in him would have eternal life. God didn’t send the son to condemn to the world, but to save it.

Maybe you’re broken. Maybe you feel trapped in a life of sin, despair and regret. Maybe there is a war going on inside you, in your home, in your office. Jesus can save you from that. Jesus offers us all a new life, a second chance, the opportunity to know real, sacrificial love. Jesus may have been born as an infant, but Jesus was God-Incarnate, God among us. And through his death and resurrection, we no longer have to trust in human-made weapons for our security. We can trust in the blood of Jesus, shed at Calvary, to redeem us and restore us.

[Title slide] This Advent, climb the mountain to restoration. See the hill topped by an empty cross – a reminder that our Prince of Peace lives and will come again. Through Christ, hope is restored and peace is found, guns are melted into art, swords are beaten into plows, spears turned into pruning hooks. Even the cross itself was formerly an instrument of torture and death, and is now our greatest symbol of hope and peace. May your hope be restored this Advent.

Let’s pray.

Memory Verse:

Psalm 122:1,3-4

“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’
Jerusalem is...where the tribes go up...to praise the name of the Lord.”

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you feel about biblical prophecy? Excited? Scared? Confused? Reassured? Why?
2. How does God’s desire for justice and world peace change your worldview? Do you see yourself as an agent for peace?
3. How often do you consider the fact that Jesus will return to earth? Does that change how you live and serve?
4. Where does the world most need peace right now? How will pray for the end of war and the beginning of restoration?
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