

Dec 7 Jesus, Prince of Peace

Isaiah 2: 1-5

Advent it is about waiting for what God will do with expectations. Advent is about Jesus coming to live amongst us as the promised Messiah. It is about God with us, Emmanuel. Advent is also about living into that promised kingdom today as if it is already a reality. But it is also that forward looking time when the reign of Christ will happen on earth.

The People of Israel had been waiting for hundreds of years for the coming of the Messiah. From Isaiah we hear that in that coming there will be peace and all will walk in the Lord's light. The history of Israel shows that the people did not try to live by these virtues as a way of preparing for that coming. We have been waiting thousands of years for the Kingdom of God to come. We too have not always tried to live as Kingdom people as a way of preparing for that coming. Advent is a time to be challenged to live into that vision of peace, to walk in the Lord's light and celebrate that the reign of God has begun!

In Jesus we celebrate that the Messiah, the peace maker, the light of God, Emmanuel, has come and is with us. Using the images of Isaiah I hear us being challenged to do several things if we are to take the message of Advent seriously.

We hear the words, "We shall beat our swords into plowshares" but what does it mean? In the time of Isaiah iron was a precious commodity. It was continually being recycled. During times of war the government seized all available iron to be turned into weapons. Amongst the items were plowshares, or the cutting blade of the plow. When peace returned swords were again reshaped by the blacksmiths back into utilitarian objects, such as plowshares. So this is talking about a time of peace when the country would no longer need the tools of war and farmers would get back their iron, making the job of plowing so much easier in the rocky soil of Palestine. Without the iron protection the wooden plows broke frequently.

This leads to the question, "What are our swords today?" We don't live in as militarized of a society as was the case in Isaiah's time so we may not have physical

weapons but we still jab at others with the intent to wound. Let me give you a short list of things we do to wound others; insults, prejudice, racism, ageism, gossip, and putdowns, to mention just a few. If we are to live into the Advent vision of Peace we need to remove these weapons from our life and focus that energy into something more productive and hopeful.

Examine your life over the past week. Did you pass on a juicy bit of news about another? It doesn't matter whether it was true or not, it was not yours to share and so you gossiped and another was hurt by it. Did you talk disparagingly about another because they fell into a class of people you don't particularly like? We can do it so easily when we talk about those of the younger generation or they of us, the more mature group; Republicans about Democrats and vice versa, or city folk verses those who enjoy small town life. You get the idea. If you found out that you were guilty of using these verbal swords were any of these comments peaceable or even more, walking in the light of God? Not likely.

So, how do we beat these, our swords, into something more positive and constructive that allows us to be agents of peace and walk in the light? Here are three suggestions:

Think before you speak. All of us have had those times where we have opened mouth and inserted foot. We see someone and share something we heard without thinking, only later realizing what hurt we might have done. Or we are so sure of our position that we obstinately hold our ground not listening to others, shutting down all communication and creating ill will. All of us need to embrace the Holy discipline of silence. We need to listen, to contemplate and reflect before we speak. When we do, we eliminate so much hurt before it even happens. So don't react but instead be proactive in thinking before speaking.

Secondly we need to lift others up instead of tearing them down. The old adage of your mother is still a good one which was, "If you can't say anything good about someone don't say anything at all." If we are to be peace makers and walk in the light we need to be agents of encouragement. We need to build up instead of tear down.

Even when we feel we need to pass on a challenging word to or about another because they need it for their own growth or we need to protect others we have to find ways to do it that are sensitive and do as little harm as possible. Just blating something out because the other needs to hear it is not helpful no matter what the justification in our mind.

I have certain family members who tend to get going on negative rants. I use to allow myself to get into their energy and start agreeing with them. It only encouraged them. Now I strive to share positives for their negatives. Usually after a few moments they go on to another topic because it is no fun talking to me about those things because I don't agree with them! But other times I am as guilty as the rest of tearing down another. So I too need to always strive to lift others up.

Third, we need to see the best in others instead of focusing on the worst. The art of compromise is almost a lost art. Now we tend to focus only on our wants and needs. Too often we hear a person belittling another who doesn't agree with them. It is putting them down instead of seeing what good their ideas might have. We label and categorize people when we are challenged to see the worth in every person. Labels make them non-entities which is why we do it.

Seeing each person as one of worth is walking in the path of Jesus and in his light. We often say about Jesus that he was willing to reach out to those on the margins. He related to the outcasts of his day, the sick, the diseased, and the women of questionable morals, to mention a few. In his interactions we always see him treating them as people not as things. He is concerned about their feelings and their pain. This is our challenge as well.

Also beside our sword stabbing where do we need to reshape our spears of anger and frustration into pruning hooks of forgiveness and tolerance? I see way too many examples of people carrying with them long held anger towards another. They get frustrated by people and by life and want to take it out on someone. Jesus calls for us to forgive and to be tolerant. This is a challenge to prune our activities and our feelings.

We are better to get rid of them and when we do we find that in forgiving and being tolerant we are at peace, we help others to be at peace and we walk in the light.

Finally, where do we need to sheath our swords and be agents of peace? Sometimes to walk in the light means to be active agents. It isn't just about changing what we say. It isn't about curbing our opinions. It is about being active agents of peace. It is being willing to get involved in the messiness of life and work at helping to resolve issues. This is something we all like to shy away from. It is disruptive to us, there is no promise of success and sometimes we get hurt in the process but the only way to make sure wars of any kind do not continue is by some people to stand up and say enough.

Recently we have been bombarded by images related to the grand jury not indicting the police officer who shot the unarmed teenager. All of us were saddened by the looting and violence. Unfortunately some, even in authority, seemed more intent on turning this event towards political ends. This was true on both sides of the spectrum. Some advocated violence as a way of ending what they saw as injustice by those in authority while others advocated even heavier police action against those who acted out. But in the midst there were a few voices who strove to be peace makers. These were people who lifted up the big picture encouraging all to work together. They were challenged by both sides but in holding to the middle provided at least a possibility of a way forward that will make this a better place for all.

So challenge yourself to live this Advent as ones who live in God's peaceable kingdom as we anticipate it coming fully to us always.