

Peace! Not...yet

Based on Isaiah 2:1-5

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

November 10, 2019

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

War has changed since the First World War, and the Second. Strategies and weapons change, but war is still ruthless, much to the frustration of the approximately 48,000 World War II and Korean War veterans whose presence among us reminds us Never to Forget the ravages of war.

Humanity, it seems, doesn't seem to learn from its history of death and destruction. Snippets of memories from my childhood linger; horror stories of political despots who crushed, massacred, people that they deemed "other" – Uganda, Cambodia, Syria, and, today, some say Saudi Arabia. God's Peaceable kin-dom has definitely not arrived yet.

The prophet Isaiah shares a vision of peace later, in chapter 11:

of a wolf living in peace with a lamb;

a leopard lying down with a goat;

...and an infant putting its hand in a viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain [Isa 11:6-8]

Thus says the LORD in Isaiah's vision. God's Vision of peace persists, the Vision is not reality... not yet.

The truth is, it can feel like we cannot be farther from God's vision of Peace when we consider more recent horrors like the Rwandan civil war and genocide Hutus massacring their Tutsi neighbours; sometimes they killed their own family members. Today, the world watches in horror as hundreds of thousands of Syrians are bombed by their own leader. All the while, the infamous leader of the superpower south of us postures by proposing to stockpile new nuclear weapons.

God's dream that the ancient Hebrew prophets sing of, has not taken hold ...yet. Yet. There is a yearning for peace, though, as primal in God's children, more so than the instinct to go to war. It is deep and ancient, that vision of peace. I'm weary of war, sitting in my comfortable chair watching the conflicts, from a safe distance.

But then...

Then I hear the voices of the parents of the Syrian refugee family that churches and community in Capreol sponsored. They are so grateful to be alive, grateful specifically to Justin Trudeau, the icon of peace for them.

I might get tired and cynical about the world, but, then this week I heard a piece on CBC Radio about this being the 30th Anniversary the beginning of the end Of the Berlin Wall – a vestige of the infamous Cold War. I have a personal connection with that flashpoint in history. I was backpacking in Germany in November of 1989, at the very moments when civilians scaled that Wall. They took sledgehammers to the symbol of the Cold War. I was not as courageous as a travelling companion, a freelance journalist, who raced to Berlin to witness a revolution and to claim a piece of that wall for herself.

I and the world watched in amazement in 1989 and beyond, as several repressive political regimes came crumbling down in succession. It was an improbable glimpse of liberation, peace, to people who had lived, locked within those systems so long.

One thing we should know about this famous Isaiah passage that Sierra read this morning. Isaiah speaks of a great “Holy Mountain” – well, God’s holy mountain was not high or grand at all. Around Jerusalem, there were no great peaks.

In fact, in the previous chapter of Isaiah, chapter 1,
God accuses the holy city of Jerusalem of murder, rebellion, injustice, and corruption (Isaiah 1:21-23). And the texts immediately following Isaiah 2:1-5, claim that God’s people have forsaken God’s ways...¹

How strange; there, embedded within God’s judgment, is a vision of hope. Perplexing as it is, that is the nature of God’s hope in the Bible. Lurking - like a lone crocus, poking through the snow.

God’s people, especially the powerful leaders, can be cruel, sadistic, narcissistic. They should know better.

But, then, along come people who dare to challenge tyranny. We have heard the stories of young men and women lying about their age in order to enlist and to serve their country; people answering a call deep within, to be brave! People are challenging tyranny right now by assuring that migrants get basic human rights in Canada, and especially at the southern border of the United States.

God’s vision of Peace, we can see it. It is close! When we pray without ceasing for the millions of refugees around the world who yearn to find home – Peace is close. When we welcome immigrants and refugees and, at the same time our neighbours might be spouting hatred and ignorance, telling new – or not-so-new - Canadians to “go home.”

We can see and taste Peace, when we say **welcome!** When we challenge hatred, xenophobia, that might offer any foothold for fascism (don’t ever doubt that it could emerge in democracies!) – wherever we speak peace in the face of hatred, We can see, taste, peace... but God’s Vision is not quite here. God’s Vision of Peace is ancient and enduring, and it LIVES in us. May we never forget the sacrifice, the courage and loss of war. But may we cherish the vision of Peace, even if it is not here...yet.

¹ Michael J. Chan’s commentary on Isaiah 2:1-5
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3116