

**Isaiah 2:1-5**

*The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

*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.  
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.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

*O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!*

***In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

**Happy New Year! While the world goes wild for Black Friday, Cyber Monday and even the goodness of Giving Tuesday, the church quietly slips away**

from the maddening crowds and whispers, Happy New Year.  
Today we begin a new year in the church.

The season of Advent which begins today with the first Sunday of Advent, marks a new year, that we will see in our gospel readings now focused on the Gospel of Matthew, the purple on the altar, and with our Advent wreath and weekly prayers.

One of the biggest challenges in the season of Advent is to be present for it. Advent is a short season just four weeks long, so if we are distracted, we can find we have missed it!

Advent can be seen only as a countdown to Christmas and yes, the arrival of the Christ child. And the candles lit each week, the daily readings can lend themselves to a countdown.

But Advent is more a season to stay present in each day to find enough quiet to savor each day.

But December is a wildly difficult month to be present in each day!

So, the church's practices of Advent can be a pool of quiet and a space to listen, in the rush in the world.

The quiet of Advent is a multiple gift: we need the quiet to find space to rest, to pray, and to hear God's voice, God's nudges in our own lives.

Many in our world seem to proclaim that they will be the loudest voice in the room, the loudest voice wins.

But not so with our God. We might remember how, when the prophet Elijah had fled his attackers and was alone in the wilderness, God speaks to Elijah, in the silence:

*Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

The quiet of Advent offers us room to rest and to pray and to wonder, and to perhaps hear the question:

*What are you doing here?*

How are we hearing and following God's call in each of our lives?

Our reading from Isaiah is one of the most familiar passages in the Old Testament, offering a vision of our God as judge, not to scold us but to set things right with us and between us.

*(God) shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

God shall judge and we will change.

This passage has offered hope for thousands of years in our world so weary of war, and still so addicted to bloodshed.

The deep changes Isaiah speaks of might be outside in the weapons, the things around us, or possibly Advent also calls us to consider, invites us to

consider, what profound change needs to happen within us, what sword within us might we ask God to change? Where could destructiveness, our warring ways, be born again as new life inside of us?

A story I read years ago about how a young man's response to this passage from Isaiah has stayed with me.

A young Mennonite named Michael Martin felt called to take today's passage from Isaiah more seriously in his life. This passage from Isaiah stayed with him for a few years, but only after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary school in 2012, killing 20 first graders and 6 educators, did Michael feel the call to act on his faith.

Michael had the training to work as a blacksmith so, feeling Isaiah's words deep in his bones, he simply offered to anyone with a gun they wanted to be rid of, that he would take it and help them to make it into a new tool, one that could be used to grow food.

Michael was very clear in our tense and so political American society to make his purpose clear. He had no interest in taking anyone's guns away, but if a gun was a burden to someone, he offered to help, following the directive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Isaiah.

Michael has had many folks come to him with guns, but the story that stayed with me from the article was of a man who still had the gun his father had used to commit suicide 40 years before.

I worked with a number of families at St. Christopher's that experienced suicide in their families, and I have had a few family members die by suicide, so I know some of the layers of pain that accompany the months and years

after a suicide.

Kevin Wilder was 8 years old when his father shot and killed himself. The family did not know what to do with the gun afterward, and so it was kept, and passed on in the family as Kevin grew up. Kevin explained the dilemma he and his mother had felt:

*“I’ve had the gun all this time. I couldn’t give it to someone else.”*

Kevin took the gun to Michael and together they re-made it into a hand cultivator for planting seeds.

Michael notes in the article that:

*“.....converting the guns has been the easy part....The hard part is the human element and changing the way we deal with conflict.”* (Plough November 2016 “Gardening with Guns: A fresh Take on ‘Swords into Ploughshares’)

After a month that included three horrific shootings, one at UVa., one at the LGBTQ Q-Club in Colorado Springs, and one at the Walmart in Chesapeake, VA, Michael’s words from six years ago ring loudly still to us.

Michael first felt a nudge simply to sit with a hear this passage from Isaiah, and that went on for a few years.

Then he felt a nudge from God after the Sandy Hook mass shooting and used the gifts he already had in new ways to help folks.

In the noise of December, the season of Advent invites us into a pool of quiet, offers us room to rest and to pray and to wonder and to listen, to listen

for God's presence in the sheer silence.

Amen.