

**Living as People of Hope**  
**Isaiah 2:1-5**  
**November 27, 2022, Sermon by Rev. Alex Creager**

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

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

When I lived in Northern Ireland, the church I was serving as a volunteer invited a Catholic priest to come and speak to the youth. That may not seem like a strange thing, but in Northern Ireland, inviting a Catholic priest to speak at a Presbyterian church was a big risk. For the church. But maybe more so for the priest. There were a lot of protestant churches where a Catholic priest would not have been welcomed as a friend but feared as an enemy. And sadly, some churches would not have felt safe even entering.

For many of our own youth that night, this was their first time sitting down not just with a priest, but anyone of the Catholic church and hearing about their faith. The priest was open and honest, welcomed every question, and took the time after our conversation to stick around and eat food and listen to our youth journeys and lives. It made a huge difference for our youth having him there. As we gathered with tea and biscuits after the conversation I told the priest, "Thank you so much for coming. This meant so much to all of us. But what led you to do this? You didn't know how welcome or even safe you'd be. And it looks like you have spoken to many churches and communities in the past. What leads to do it?"

And this young priest (maybe 25 years old or so) said back to me, "I do it, because I have to have hope that things can change. I have to believe that our youth will one day know each other and our communities far better. That the divide and violence will end. And it won't be a strange thing to come into a different community than my own and speak any longer. I believe that day will come. But until then, I need to live into that hope. If that's what I want to see, I need to start living it now."

That priest was wise and eloquent and thoughtful. But I found that same sentiment shared with so many peacemakers across Northern Ireland. We don't see the results yet. But we are going to hope. We are going to believe. We are going to take daring risks of crossing that divide, of offering up love and welcome and understanding, of going into communities and meeting people and showing love even where we don't know it's safe yet, because that is the future, we believe in.

Hope for these people was not just something to say you believe in. It was a whole way of life. Hope was a change in the way we live and interact and serve and care and teach and love. Hope is risky action. Hope is living into the future we want, not just the comfort of the present day.

In Isaiah 2, we get this beautiful vision of what hope can look like. In the midst of a brutal time in world history, nations being invaded, hunger and war, slavery and captivity, hatred and terrible loss of life, comes this radical view. What if through God's love, all nations came together? What if through God's love, we don't run to meet each other on the battlefield, but instead, we walked together to sing and share meals and learn and worship and celebrate? What if through God's love, all

the things that tell us to kill each other and destroy each other are brought low, and all the things that call us to unite and dream and seek peace are brought high. What if instead of carrying swords and guns, spears, and armor, we carried gardening plows and pruning hooks, and created a beautiful garden together?

All of that sounds crazy, and pie in the sky. Today, and definitely in Isaiah's day. Get together with the Assyrians and Babylonians and Egyptians who are invading our lands? Even get Judah and Israel together, we who have a lot of bad blood and history between us? No way, that's not possible. And if so, let them take the first step.

But God has a different message to Isaiah and to all of God's people. God says, not only is this possible. But I want you to be living into that hope now. Throw out your weapons. Stop practicing war and violence. Meet neighbors across the divide. Walk into that light. Dream of a better future not just with words and images, but with action and risk and fearlessness. Imagine that future God wants for our world and live that way now.

What would that look like in our own time, in our own world? What would it look like to hear these words of Isaiah and living into the coming light of the Lord?

It might look like sitting down with Coming to the Table, learning more deeply about racism, and taking steps to fight it in our own lives and our own communities here in Richmond.

It might look like joining with our Interfaith Trialogue and welcoming our Muslim and Jewish and Catholic and Baptist neighbors, not as competitors, but as friends, with wisdom and love to share.

It might look like doing the work mentioned here, planting gardens together, maybe in the heart of Richmond, maybe in unlikely places and believing that those seeds will grow.

It may be joining with brothers and sisters and believing we can reduce gun violence in our city and community.

It may be starting a new ministry we haven't dreamed up yet, but you have, and you believe in.

This week I want you to hear those words of Isaiah, "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." And as you do so, dream. Hope. Believe. But don't let them just become words. But actions and change and steps you can take to live as one who believes this step is worth it. That God is not finished. That Christ has come, and Christ will come again to make all things new and whole and beautiful. And in this time, we should live not as the present tells us. But as the future calls us. As children of hope, living in the light of the Lord. Amen.