

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

November 28, 2021

Awakening

“Bright Hope for Tomorrow”

Isaiah 2:1-5

Rev. Mike Fordham

For me as a child, there were so many memories and aspects of Advent and Christmas that made it special: a break from school, great holiday food, beautiful music, Christmas Eve Candlelight services, Christmas TV shows and movies, beautiful lights, and decorations everywhere, and for me as a child, presents, presents, and more presents. I could tell you it was all about Jesus for me but as a child Jesus was a part of the picture, but it was really about the presents and then everything else. I do recall one tool used in our family that created an extra level of excitement and anticipation for me and that was the Advent Calendar. Today, they come in all shapes and sizes, wooden, cardboard, knitted and more. They basically are made with doors or windows that represent each day of Advent leading up to the glorious day of Christmas. When you open the door it might have candy in it or a picture of some sort, some sort of different surprise behind each door. It was just another way of counting down to Christmas morning, building the anticipation of when we finally would beg our parents to wake up and open presents. The Advent calendar as well as the Advent wreath point to the meaning of Advent. Advent in Latin literally means “coming” and refers to the arrival of a notable person, place, or thing. For most in the church today, Advent, is a few weeks of waiting to celebrate the first coming of Jesus into this world on Christmas morning. Did you know, though, that in its earliest years, Advent was a season of 40 days of preparation for Epiphany, when Jesus was baptized, and the day that many new Christians would be baptized and welcomed into the church? Then somewhere around the 6th century, Advent began to be linked to not as much the coming of Jesus through His birth, but a season of great expectation of Jesus’ 2nd coming into the world. Then it was about the Middle Ages that Advent also became a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus’ first coming at His birth. In our text this morning we have both elements of Advent, of a hopeful future and yet also a present reality of God’s kingdom already at work among us. Let us listen carefully for both of these elements from the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days, the mountain of the LORD’s house

will be the highest of all—

the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills,

and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

³ *People from many nations will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of Jacob’s God.
There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths.”
For the LORD’s teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.*

⁴ *The LORD will mediate between nations
and will settle international disputes.
They will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore.*

⁵ *Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!*

HOPEFUL FUTURE

Isaiah was a prophet somewhere around 600 years before Jesus’ birth. As a prophet, Isaiah spoke for God in this section of Isaiah to the people of Judah and especially those at the capital of Jerusalem. When Isaiah was speaking to the Jews here in chapter 2, the nation was at an all-time low, spiritually, morally, and economically. Their hearts and lives were far away from God and through Isaiah God was calling them to return back to Him. Here in *Isaiah 2*, in the midst of strong words of correction and coming judgment God gives Isaiah a message to share of a **HOPEFUL FUTURE**. Isaiah is saying that while things are bleak now and will definitely get much worse, God offers a hopeful future that is so great that it is hard to believe, almost impossible. The phrase that Isaiah uses, “*In latter days*,” points to the future, but offers no clue as to how far in the future this might be. What is clear is that it will be, by the grace of God, a glorious future. Isaiah shares the prophecy as if all this is going to happen on God’s holy hill in Jerusalem, that sometimes is called Zion. It is a time when God will once and for all fully bring His mighty Kingdom to this world and God will rule from His throne as King over His Kingdom. It will also not just be a Kingdom for the Jews, but also the Gentiles. People from all walks of life, from all nations, languages, skin colors, cultures, who make God their God will be members of this great and mighty eternal nation. God’s love will embrace all who follow Him as their God.

This will be one mighty nation under God where all God’s people will live their lives in unity, perfectly following God’s will and in so doing they will no longer need weapons as they will experience perfect peace. That is why it says that they will take their destructive weapons of warfare and turn them into productive tools for bringing new life. Today at the United Nations headquarters in New York, there is a Bronze statue approximately 9’ tall of a man holding a hammer in one hand and, in the other, a sword which he is making into a plough share. It was made to symbolize humanity’s desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all

humanity. The statue obviously found its inspiration from Isaiah's words of a hopeful future where we will never again need a weapon to defend ourselves from evil in this world. When that time comes we will never need anything to protect ourselves as we will be perfectly safe as we experience eternal peace in community with God and all God's people from all time and all walks of life.

This seemingly impossible, idealistic, future will only be made possible when Jesus returns and sits on the throne of God's perfect Kingdom. It will be a time when the words of *Philippians 2:9-11* will be fully realized as it says about Jesus coming to reign over His eternal Kingdom as its King, "*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Advent then is meant to be a time when believe that Jesus did come on that first Noel, and just as all God's people waited for the Messiah to come then, so we also today wait for Jesus the Messiah to come again when all the world will know that He is here, and He will transform all of heaven and earth forever for us to make our perfect home once and for all. Advent is a time when all of creation is longing to be set free from sin and death once and for all. All of creation is saying, come once again Lord Jesus and set us free from sickness, pain, sadness, addictions, emotional struggles, conflict, hatred, violence, wars, brokenness, death, and all destruction that sin brings. Once and for all please set us free, Lord Jesus.

While waiting in a Nazi prison cell in 1943 a few weeks before Advent, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a friend, "A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes, does various unessential things, and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened *from the outside*, is not a bad picture of Advent." Sadly, shortly after penning those words, the Nazis executed Bonhoeffer. But Bonhoeffer was right: the door of freedom for him and for us today is still opened *from the outside* by the 1st and 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. This hopeful future will not be something we have the power ourselves to bring. Only God can do this for us. The promise that God gives us of this hopeful future is impossible without God. God promises one day to come through Jesus and open the door of freedom for all creation. That is what we long for in the season of Advent.

PRESENT REALITY

As amazing as all of that is, we are not there yet. The best is definitely yet to come. What do we do in the meantime, while we wait and long for Jesus' 2nd coming? Isaiah answers this question in *verse 5* when he calls on all God's people to now walk in the light of God. In other words, we are now to live our lives in the light of Jesus' 1st coming. Advent is a time where we recognize, believe, proclaim, and celebrate that Jesus has come into this world and when Jesus came into this world, He brought the beginnings of the Kingdom of God into the world. Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of God and Him bringing it into this world. Jesus then invited us to become a part of this Kingdom, which is how we walk in the light of God preparing for Jesus' 2nd coming. The first step

is to be born into Jesus' Kingdom now. As Jesus said in *John 3:3*, *"³ Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.'"* The first step is to become a child of God, saying yes to Jesus' love for us and then becoming members of the of God. Then Jesus brings His Kingdom into our lives, Jesus then makes His throne in our hearts and our lives. Jesus changes our lives. *1 Peter 2:9-12* puts it this way, *"⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ 'Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy.' ¹¹ Dear friends, I warn you as 'temporary residents and foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. ¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world."* We are now to live in this world as God's royal children, recognizing that this life is our home away from home. This life is a time of preparation for what God has in store for us in our hopeful future when the Kingdom of God will fully come.

In the meantime, we live as royal children of God in this world by daily walking closely with God in our relationship with Him, and by being obedient to God's will in everything we do in our lives. As Jesus said in *Matthew 7:21*, *"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter."* When we live in the light of God, God then uses us to bring His grace, love, peace, and truth to this world and then God uses us to bring people to Jesus who then welcomes them into God's kingdom now and in eternity. Walking in the light as Isaiah calls us to do is living our lives today getting ready for Jesus' 2nd coming.

In Gary Thomas' book, *Sacred Search*, he suggests that nobody who wants to keep on living wakes up one morning and suddenly decides out of the blue that are going to just go and climb Mount Everest that day. It would be a death sentence. Such a monumental assault requires training, preparation, and gear. *Lots* of gear. In fact, experts suggest those who climb Mount Everest should approach it with no fewer than 3 separate pairs of boots: double plastic climbing boots, fully insulated overboots, and light hiking boots. And yeah—you need crampons, and certainly gaiters, and booties. Plus socks. Wool socks, pile socks, synthetic socks. Lots of socks. Tools help keep you alive, so don't scrimp here—you'll want an ice ax, carabiners, ascenders, a rappel device, a climbing harness, trekking poles. To stay warm, you'll need plenty of good underwear, a pile jacket, pile pants, down pants, a down parka, a Gore-Tex shell with a hood, and probably a bib. Along with your sleeping bag you'll need two different sleeping pads (and a repair kit). Plan on two pairs of synthetic gloves and two pairs of pile mitts or Gore-Tex overmitts. Hand warmers are optional, but you won't regret bringing them. For your head you'll want a baseball cap or some kind of sun hat, at least a visor Many climbers also like to use a neoprene face mask, and make sure you include a headlamp (with plenty of extra bulbs and batteries). And toilet paper. *Please* don't forget the toilet paper. Climbing Everest is a big deal. You need to be prepared.

The same is true in getting ready for eternity. Advent is a time of preparation, while we are waiting with great anticipation and excitement for the day that Jesus will return and fully set us free.

So, are we waiting, excited and ready for Jesus' 2nd coming, His 2nd Advent? Are we celebrating Jesus' 1st coming and also getting ready for Jesus' 2nd coming? Are we now living in the light of God's presence in every area of our lives? That's the best way to celebrate and experience fully this Advent season.

Icebreaker I – What was your favorite family Christmas tradition growing up? What traditions have you carried into adulthood and passed down to your children?

Icebreaker II – Share an event in your life in which you put a lot of effort into preparation. Have you ever experienced a time where you were unprepared for a situation in which you thought you had sufficiently prepared?

1. "The mountain of the Lord" refers to the site upon which the temple in Jerusalem was built. What picture does Isaiah envision?
2. Why are so many coming to the temple?
3. What will God do for them?
4. What do you think is meant by "the last days?"
5. Why does Isaiah call Judah to come to the temple *at this time*?
6. What of your life? Are you fashioning yourself as a sword or being fashioned into a plow? Which of your swords and spears (i.e. Mean streak? Angry outbursts? Cutting tongue?) has God transformed into *tools for peace*?
7. What does the New Testament make of Isaiah's vision? Did or will Jesus inaugurate this era of peace? If so, when will it be fulfilled? Why do you think so?
8. How might this vision of God's kingdom shape your hope? Prayers? Values?