

The prophet Isaiah saw the Word and shared his vision with the people. The day is coming when the mountain of God will be lifted high above all other mountains. All the nations will stream to it so that they might learn *God's ways* in order to walk in the paths of God. (Isaiah 2:1-3)

What are these ways of God we might ask? Well the 1st chapter of Isaiah begins dramatically telling us what they are not. “I had children and raised them well, and they turned on me...My people don't know up from down. Shame! Misguided God-dropouts...band of vandals – My people have walked out on me, their God, turned their backs on The Holy of Israel, walked off and never looked back. Why bother even trying to do anything with you when you just keep to your bullheaded ways?”

“...Quit your worship charades. I can't stand your trivial religious games: Monthly conferences, weekly Sabbaths, special meetings – meetings, meetings, meetings – I can't stand one more! Meetings for this, meetings for that! I hate them! You've worn me out! I'm sick of your religion, religion, religion, while you go right on sinning.”

“When you put on your next prayer-performance, I'll be looking the other way. No matter how long or loud or often you pray, I'll not be listening. And do you know why? Because you've been tearing people to pieces, and your hands are bloody.” (see Isaiah 1 – *The Message*)

God confronts us in our wrongful living, yet the prophetic message always contains a call to repentance and ultimately a vision of hope. “Go home and wash up. Clean up your act. Sweep your lives clean of your evildoings so I don't have to look at them any longer. Say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless.” (see Isaiah 1 – *The Message*)

This is the new vision that comes from the mount of God. “In days to come...all the nations shall stream to the mountain. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain...that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths...God 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.’”

I was talking with a colleague this week who just accepted a new call to serve as pastor of a church in a small town that is dependent upon one industry. He said that in the town everyone's economic wellbeing is in some way tied to this industry, and the life and the death of the whole town are dependent upon it. The industry is a military defense contractor for our government, and so I asked him how he would preach this Isaiah passage for this first Sunday of Advent. He quickly said he would skip over it.

Fifty plus years ago, as the Korean War waned, our President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. His speech “The Chance for Peace!” was really addressed to the Soviet Union in a time of Cold War escalation of armaments. Eisenhower said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children...This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

Eisenhower goes on to encourage a stop to the escalation of the arms race. “...The fruit of success in (disarmament programs) would present the world with the greatest task, and the

¹ www.eisenhowermemorial.org/speeches/19530416%20Chance%20for%20Peace.htm

greatest opportunity, of all. It is this: the dedication of the energies, the resources, and the imaginations of all peaceful nations to a new kind of war. This would be a declared total war, not upon any human enemy but upon the brute forces of poverty and need. The peace we seek...can be fortified, not by weapons of war but by wheat and by cotton, by milk and by wool, by meat and by timber and by rice. These are words that translate into every language on earth. These are the needs that challenge this world in arms.”

And this world in arms. These words of Eisenhower that echoed the swords-to-plowshares vision of Isaiah still echo true for us today. These are piercing words as we begin this season of Advent as a nation at war. We sing of expectation – Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Born to set thy people free, Hope of all the earth, Death’s dark shadows put to flight, bind all peoples in one heart and mind, and fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.

These are the words we sing. This is the Jesus we are waiting for. This is the Christ who became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. This is the Christ who comes to be the center of our lives, around which everyone will reorient themselves seeing the Word and each other in a new way.

As I’ve prepared for Advent this year, I’ve been reading one of Eugene Peterson’s most recent books, *The Jesus Way*². This is the third in a trilogy of books that also includes *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* and *Eat This Book*. Peterson is exploring the ways that Jesus is the way. In simple terms, I’ve long tried to boil my own faith down as a response to Jesus’ call, “Come and follow me.” Jesus says to us, “I am the way,” and Peterson’s book has helped me to expand that metaphor beyond simply envisioning a path to follow.

He writes, “*Way*: a simple noun designating a road that leads to a destination, but then opening up as a metaphor that ramifies into many and various “ways” – not only the way we go, as in the route we take, but the way we go on the way ... The way we talk, the way we use our influence, the way we treat another, the way we raise our children, the way we read, the way we worship, the way we vote, the way we garden...the way we feel, the way we eat...And on and on, endlessly, the various and accumulated “ways and means” that characterize our way of life³.”

So the now-worn-out question intended to guide our faithful living, “What would Jesus do?” might more appropriately be replaced by the question, “How would Jesus do it?”

As we enter into this season of Advent, I invite and challenge you to take on a spirit of expectancy and attentiveness – expectant for God’s bursting into the everyday world in often unnoticed ways and attentive to the *how* of your living the life you have been given. In one of his chapters about Isaiah in *The Jesus Way*, Peterson writes, “Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, there is *more*, and the more is God, revealing himself in Jesus by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.”

He continues, “...And the *more* is not often obvious, in fact more often obscure...But here’s the thing: the least hint of holiness has the power to set off this chain reaction of holy living in any one of us. Without question it is dangerous. We most certainly will lose our lives as we have conceived them. But that is only the beginning. The Holy pulls, often only at the far edges of our awareness, at every fiber of our God-created, Jesus-saved being⁴.”

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. What has come into

² Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 138.

What and How – **Isaiah 2:1-5** – Rev. Drew Henry
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being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (See John 1:1-5, 14) O house of Jacob, o friends of mine made brothers and sisters in Christ, come, come into this Advent season, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!” Amen.