

Sermon for November 27, 2016
"What I Really Want for Christmas"

Isaiah 2:1-5

I know that Christmas is coming because my family has started asking me what I want for Christmas. I remember not knowing what to get my dad when he was my age. I guess I have reached a place in my life when I really don't want much stuff. I will say sweaters and ties and belts and other items that I need anyway. Maybe some videos or CDs. Yes, I still use CDs. Call me old school. Maybe some cute electronic gadgets or cooking utensils.

But is that what I really want or is that just what I think I can get. What I really want is much less tangible and obtainable. I can't easily put it on a Christmas list and mail it to the North Pole. I want all the troops to come home. I want husbands and wives and children and grandparents to come together in love. I want all injustice to end so that people no longer have a reason to fight. I want the armies of the world to disband because everlasting peace has suddenly broken out all over the world. I want the tanks, and the missiles, and the planes, and ships to all be refitted for feeding the hungry and bringing aid to those in need. I want to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I want to buy the world a Coke and keep it company.

I really don't think I will get any of that for Christmas this year. So I guess I will settle for some clothes and an electronic gadget or two. You know, I think that's the way a lot of people feel. We all want those things I talked about, but we settle for much lesser things instead. We might harp on the materialism of Christmas. Perhaps it is all about people who really want the peace and harmony settling for what they can get.

Isaiah knew how we feel. God gave Isaiah a vision and the promise of the kind of world filled with peace and justice we long for. Isaiah lived in a time when nations regularly attacked one another and where kings were even more unjust than in our world. God told Isaiah, and the people of his day, that a time is coming when God will rule the world. God will establish justice and righteousness. And as a result wars will cease and armies will disband. And the implements of war, swords and spears, will be reconfigured for growing food, plows and pruning hooks.

This is a promise from God! But it's awfully hard to believe that it will come any time soon. Just look at the world. People are ruled by greed for money and power. The idea of all the people of the world turning to God for guidance and justice, and peace breaking out at every corner of the world is beyond belief. Isaiah prophesied this hundreds of years before Jesus and it still hasn't happened.

We Christians believe that this is one of those prophecies that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. When Jesus comes again at some time in the future that we don't know, then he will establish justice and peace. At that point there will be no need for armies and weapons. And Jesus will teach the world to sing in perfect harmony and keep us all company.

So what do we do in the mean time? Isaiah says, "Let us walk in the light of the Lord." Perhaps this knowledge can inform and govern the way we live our lives. Maybe we

can live as those who have seen peace from a far. We live in the here and now amongst swords and spears. But perhaps we can live as people who know that the age of plowshares and pruning hooks is coming.

Have you ever known about something before others and had it effect how you live your lives. That prior knowledge of upcoming events led you to do something different. I was in a church once where the people were trying to arrange a surprise baby shower for one of its active members. We were calling and cancelling meetings without reason in order manipulate events to get her in the right place at the right time. The poor woman thought the whole church was going crazy. Our prior knowledge prompted us to act differently than we would have otherwise.

You see God is going to throw the world a surprise peace shower. And we have advanced notice of it. We as followers of Christ are at work in the world preparing for this party. That prior knowledge governs the way we act. Our action presume that peace is coming, when all the externally verifiable variables point to a continuation of wars and rumors of wars.

Once upon a time there was a land of darkness. People there had heard of light before but many thought it was just a myth. Some said that at one time there was light but few believed. In fact most people never bothered to open their eyes. Small children were warned about running with their eyes open. They might fall and be poked in the eye.

But there was a woman who knew that a time of light was coming. She believe in it so much that each day she opened her window and opened her eyes to see if the light had come. And she told people that she did this. They said she was crazy, a dreamer, and that she might get poked in the eye if she was no careful. But a few people thought, "What if she is right?" and they opened their eyes to see if the light had come.

We live in a land of darkness. And we believe that the light is coming. Others may think us foolish and call us dreamers. But we need to keep opening our eyes and looking for the light. Perhaps we can inspire others to do the same!

But there is another question. How do we know for sure that this age of peace will come? I mean it has been over 2,000 years. Is there a statute of limitations of prophecies? Does the book of Isaiah have an expiration date? Do we have any evidence that this day we long for will come?

Christmas is that evidence. Jesus came once and that is proof that he will come again. He did not bring an end to wars and violence. He did not usher in a new age of world peace, but he did bring peace to many people's lives.

Sisters and brothers, let us live by the light of this truth. Let us be as those who know that something greater is coming. When you greet people in the mall, let it be as one who knows that there is something greater coming. When you visit family and friends do it knowing that there is a time of peace and light just over the horizon. Let us act out the conviction that the world will one day turn to God for justice and righteousness. We may settle for the things of this age, but let us live by the light of the hope of the age to come!