

A Vision of Peace

July 05, 2020

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Isaiah 2 Common English Bible (CEB) The Lord's mountain
2 This is what Isaiah, Amoz's son, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 In the days to come
the mountain of the
Lord's house will be the
highest of the
mountains. It will be
lifted above the hills;
peoples will stream to it.

3 Many nations will go and say,
"Come, let's go up to the
Lord's mountain, to the
house of Jacob's God
so that he may teach
us his ways and we
may walk in God's
paths."

Instruction will come
from Zion; the Lord's
word from Jerusalem.

4 God will judge between
the nations, and settle
disputes of mighty
nations.

Then they will beat their
swords into iron plows and
their spears into pruning tools.

Nation will not take up sword
against nation; they will no
longer learn how to make

war.

5 Come, house of Jacob,
let's walk by the Lord's light.

Hard Times: Hope From the Prophets

- A Vision of Peace
Isaiah's vision of peace
would make a fantastic mini-movie!

The story goes like this. Times are hard. A conquering nation is invading, and they are willing to use brutal measures to rule. In the midst of desperate times, though, Isaiah has a vision of hope.

Envision Isaiah's words in your mind's eye. Picture what God's holy mountain might look like. It might look like your favorite mountain. This particular mountain has become so important that it has been lifted up -- higher than all the other hills! And imagine the camera shot --- you are looking off that high mountain top and seeing people of all nations, all kinds of different people, just streaming up the mountain. Can you picture a huge diversity of people making their way up that mountain. I can just see them! And they are coming to be taught about the love that God has for them and to learn what it means to live the way that God wants them to--to walk in God's path. The people learn this lesson so well that when they go down off that mountain, when they go back to their ordinary lives-- instead of taking up swords and spears against one another like before, blacksmiths literally beat those weapons into plows and pruning tools because that is what the Lord taught them. Can you envision the people going back to their homes -- going back to all those various nations. And they take their weapons of war and literally transform them into weapons of agriculture in obedience to God-- trusting that God

would protect them even without their weapons. God's message has totally transformed their thinking **and** their action! They have gone from fighting and war and violence against the people of other nations to working for the good of God's people -- they begin to grow food for all nations -- for all of God's people.

Instead of using instruments of war, they use instruments of compassion. Instead of using instruments of death, they use instruments of life. Hatred is replaced with love! Maybe this vision of a new way of life is exactly what we need to bring us fresh hope in **these** hard times. Because couldn't we all use a fresh vision of peace and the unity of all God's people this very day.

Now before I say more, I need to address the elephant in the room. I need to be honest -- this message of peace and not war is difficult to reconcile. I think about various scriptures in the Bible where war is waged. I think about the crusades when Christians killed in the name of Christ. I think about just war theory and the idea that perhaps some wars are justified. And with our Independence Day holiday this weekend, I remember that our country was birthed through the Revolutionary War! And not only that, but in a personal effort to learn all that I can about our treatment of indigenous people and the history of slavery and racial injustices in our country, I am finally opening my eyes to the many ways that we as a country have not and we still do not live out the ideals of freedom, justice and equality for all people. Now, I am going to leave the elephant in the room for you all to speak to. As you meet with your small groups this week, please talk about all these issues. And the "higher, deeper, broader" discussion guide that you will get in your email this afternoon will help you think through and

discuss some of these issues.

But, the thing that I finally realized as I struggled with this scripture is that this is why we have prophets like Isaiah - so that we can hear a hard truth. It is prophets like Isaiah who are able to get up on a high mountaintop and get a better perspective of the world. Don't you have a better perspective when you are on a mountain -- everything looks different - you can see the whole, broad picture. You can see patterns that you couldn't see from sea level. Prophets have this gift from God of being able to see from this 30,000 foot view and get a clearer picture of injustice and oppression -- they can really see our disobedience and lack of trust in God. And prophets speak the truth for all who have ears to hear. They can see their own present day reality, but they can also imagine how God's kingdom will look one day and to share a vision of hope with us.

And so I want to use the scripture as a framework for how we as God's people might bring Isaiah's vision of peace into reality--- at least in our own little corners of the world where we have influence. So, let's start with the mountain.

If you think back to the mini movie in your mind, part of this scripture is all those people streaming up God's mountain. And do you remember how it is the highest of mountains and there must be amazing views. And so, perhaps the first thing that we must do in order to really figure out what it is that God is calling us to do is to get up on that mountain with God and get a fresh perspective. And on that mountain there is teaching and instruction going on. The text says, "Come, let's go up to the Lord's mountain...so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths." As we draw near to God and hear the words of the prophets of old speaking a fresh word in our lives even today, I think we might become convinced afresh of this

particular teaching to live differently. And then after we have spent time with God, when we go back down to the valley of our lives, we might put away anger, fear and hatred and take up love, compassion and peace in whatever ways we can -- in obedience to the ways the Holy Spirit urges us.

When we spend time with God, we can get a better perspective. We can begin to truly see the needs of the world, we can learn the path God has for us to be instruments of peace, and then we can do our part to bring life and not death into our relationships, and our community and our world. The kingdom of God is so far beyond what we might accomplish on our own that sometimes we feel hopeless to make a difference. But you may have heard it said before that while none of us can do it all, we can each do **something**. And in fact, part of the reason God created us is to each do something to bring God's kingdom to earth. Since the beginning of time, the Holy Spirit has been using God's people to do whatever their part is in their day and in their time.

Oscar Romero is one of those people who did what he could to make this vision of peace a reality. You may know his story. He was a Catholic priest who became the archbishop of San Salvador in 1977; sadly, he was shot and killed while celebrating mass in 1980. As part of Romero's work for God "he spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture amid a growing war between left-wing and right-wing forces" where the poorest of the people were disproportionately affected.¹ He believed that the church, in particular, had a role in speaking out **against** violence and **for** peace in the name of Jesus. Romero's work was inspired by the time he spent with God -- on the mountain so to speak - learning from God's word

how to walk in God's path. He spent time in prayer and Bible study even joining with the ignored and oppressed in his country to study the Bible and pray together. And the story goes that he gained great wisdom from these meetings with the poor.

Although many would label **Romero** as a modern-day prophet, the website of the Romero Center described **the poor** as unexpected prophets who helped Romeo gain the vision of what a world of peace and justice might look like. I love this quote from Oscar Romero about peace: "**We want peace**, but not the peace of violence and of cemeteries...We want peace that is the fruit of justice, peace that is the fruit of obedience to God."

Shane Claiborne is one of those people who is doing what he can to make this vision of peace a reality. You may know his story. Shane Claiborne is an activist and author. He leads a movement called Red Letter Christians named after the Bibles where the actual words of Jesus are in red letters -- the Red Letter Christians are committed to living "as if Jesus meant the things he said." His website describes his life like this: "Shane is a champion for grace which has led him to jail advocating for the homeless, and to places like Iraq and Afghanistan to stand against

war. Now grace fuels his passion to end the death penalty and help stop gun violence"² One of

the things that Shane and a professional blacksmith named Michael Martin have been doing these days is literally hammering guns into garden tools at events around the country to bring attention to the devastating effects of gun violence. The idea is not just to make a bunch of garden tools, but to help "move communities away from violence," to provide training, encourage relationship building and dialogue, as well as to draw attention to the need for common

sense gun regulation like background checks for gun owners.³

1
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%93scar_Romero 2
<http://www.shaneclaiborne.com/new-page/>

3 <https://rawtools.org/https://religionandpolitics.org/2019/04/23/beating-guns-into-garden-tools-an-interview-with-christian-activist-shane-claiborne/>

Cameron Kasky is one of those people who is doing what he can to make this vision of peace a reality. You may know his story. He's one of the Parkland Kids. Cameron was a junior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, when a former student entered the school in 2018 and opened fire with an AR15 killing 17 students and staff members. Cameron started a movement known as #neveragain with other students from the school to raise their voices to curb gun violence. The young people continue to work for solutions to the mass shootings that have become almost commonplace in our country.⁴

You see, God's Spirit is inspiring each of us, even teenagers, to see injustices around us more fully and to live and act in peace.

Yesterday I read this about our nation's birthday: "Through our history we see America is at its best when it confronts hard

truths and asks difficult questions of itself.” I think this is true about us as a nation and about us as followers of Jesus. It is the reason the prophets of old spoke up. It is the reason the prophets of today do what they do.

On July 5, 2020, so many voices are crying out on behalf of the victims of oppression, injustice and violence that we can't ignore them any more.

We walk in God's ways, and we stand in the light of Christ when we do our best to confront the hard truths and ask ourselves difficult questions. And that brings me to the most important story.

Jesus Christ, God with us -- he lived in ways that help us to learn the path of God. You may know **his** story. Jesus stood on a mountain one day and said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.” During the last week of his life, he healed the ear of a soldier when Peter sliced off his ear, and he said, “Put your swords away.” As Jesus was tried, beaten and crucified he did not fight back, and he prayed for the forgiveness of those who were wrongfully killing him. And when teaching his followers he insisted: “My peace I give you. My peace I leave with you.”

No wonder he is called the Prince of Peace.

There will be no war or violence or hatred when we reach God's heavenly kingdom. If you pay close attention to today's scripture it is God who judges the disputes and negotiates the peace among the nations, not humans. But what will **we** do in the meantime?

What is your story? What role is God offering to you in bringing a measure of peace to your relationships, to your community and to the world?

How are we feeding people instead of fighting with people?

How are we listening to each other instead
of yelling at each other? How are we
speaking words of love and not hate?
How are we choosing
compassion and not anger? How
are we bringing life and not
death?

Do you hear the voices of the prophets?
Come, house of Jacob,
let's walk by the Lord's light.

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

⁴ <https://time.com/longform/never-again-movement/>