



Connecting to Hope

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron,
with the People of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska
First Sunday of Advent 2022
November 27, 2022

Welcome to the first Sunday of Advent,

the season of the Church preceding Christmas,

and the season when the Church is most out of step with the larger culture.

Already we are at a time when (at least in our imaginations)

homes are twinkling and cozy and organized, and

hearts are at their most charitable...even if our anxiety and frazzled schedules keep us
from acting on that charity...

This is the image from the larger culture, already surrounding us,

And we, the Church, practice a season of paying careful attention to *what really is*

And *what ought to be*.

We talk of longing, and waiting, expecting, and working toward what ought to be,

But much of the task begins with watching and seeing what really is.

This year, at St. Mary's, we will tune our ears to hear especially from the prophet Isaiah,

Who wrote in a time that may sound familiar:

People—the elders, at least—could remember a time that seemed normal, and good.

They had known political stability, economic sufficiency, and social solidarity. But that time was becoming more difficult to remember, a more distant memory, International tension was rising, and Assyria was encroaching any sense of self-determination that Israel may have had.

Uncertainty and stress were thoroughgoing—politically, economically, and socially.

Part of today's reading from Isaiah is likely familiar to us.

*all the nations shall stream to God's holy mountain.....
...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

Early this week I heard a song by Spencer LaJoye (Luh JOY) that is a reflection on this text.

Rather than describe it, I'm grateful to Karl Wilhelmi and Lana Ramos for preparing it so that you can hear it.

KARL AND LANA SING HERE.....(song lyrics on last page)

Dear sibling, dear baby,

Dear end-of-your-rope,

Dear go-it-alone, dear running from home,

Dear wounded, and burdened,

Dear one with a mean voice in your head,

Dear grieving, dear anxious,

Dear lonely, and recently spouseless,
Dear bullied, and calloused,
Dear child at the border,
Dear one who has given up trying to belong...

Dear people, dear families, dear nations

Dear world as we are

Dancing and limping and crying and singing

Rushing and streaming as a river toward the mountain of God

Toward the *world as God dreams*

World as it ought to be

Every breath a prayer

Every step an act, a testimony of hope.

We can picture this stream of God's beloved

Headed toward the mountaintop.

It's a stream of the wounded and struggling

A stream of people who will not hide their eyes—

Perhaps because the CANNOT—

From the world as it is,

Climbing, straining toward the world made right.

There is a deep beauty in the scene, especially from a distant view...

...and also, if we draw in more closely, pay closer attention,

I suppose that we will see a different sort of beauty—

The kind born as people recognize themselves as sharing a Longing, a goal,

When I recognized an Other as a companion, and friend, pilgrim together,

When they are connected...

When what has divided us

Is transformed into something that unites us.

*I pray if a prayer has been used as a sword
against you and your heart, against you and your word
I pray that this prayer is a plowshare, of sorts
that it might break you open, it might help you grow*

All the times I've heard and used this imagery,

I've missed that both swords and plowshares, both spear and pruning hook

Are CONNECTIONS of sorts—between 2 persons, between person and land—

And both swords and plow blades, both spear and pruning hook

pierce and break and cut and lop off

One for destruction, an done for growth.

Like Isaiah's earliest audience,

we live at time of uncertainty that can make us fearful and distrustful of others,

breaking connections

we live in a world that seems to rejoice in tearing apart.

Isaiah – as prophets do-says that there is another way.

A way of transforming what harms into what nourishes.

I don't know exactly what that might look like, this week, this year,

I am convinced, however, that it will begin with leaning in to what IS,

And leaning in to descriptions of what OUGHT TO BE.

The plow blade breaks ground

That grows wheat that is broken

To make bread

That we break

And share –part into you, and part into me....

Isaiah's vision of a land ravaged by sword-wielding and spear-hurling soldiers

Is transformed into fertile land providing food for a peace-filled community.

Together, connected,

Going in hope,

Come, let us stream to God's mountain,

Let us walk in the light of God. Amen.

Plowshare Prayer
By Spencer LaJoye, 2021

Dear blessed creator, dear mother, dear savior
Dear father, dear brother, dear holy other
Dear sibling, dear baby, dear patiently waiting
Dear sad and confused, dear stuck and abused

Dear end-of-your-rope, dear worn out and
broke,

Dear go-it-alone, dear running from home
Dear righteously angry, forsaken by family
Dear jaded and quiet, dear tough and defiant

*I pray that I'm heard
And I pray that this works*

*I pray if a prayer has been used as a sword
against you and your heart, against you and your
word*

*I pray that this prayer is a plowshare, of sorts
that it might break you open, it might help you
grow*

I pray that your body gets all that it needs
and if you don't want healing, I just pray for
peace

I pray that your burden gets lighter each day
I pray the mean voice in your head goes away

I pray that you honor the grief as it comes
I pray you can feel all the life in your lungs
I pray that if you go all day being brave
that you can go home, go to bed feeling safe

I pray you're forgiven, I pray you forgive
I pray you set boundaries and openly live
I pray that you feel you are worth never leaving
I pray that you know I will always believe you

*I pray that you're heard
and I pray that this works*

Amen on behalf of the last and the least
On behalf of the anxious, depressed, and
unseen

Amen for the workers, the hungry, the houseless
Amen for the lonely and recently spouseless

Amen for the queers and their closeted peers

Amen for the bullied who hold in their tears

Amen for the mothers of little Black sons

Amen for the kids who grow up scared of guns

Amen for the addicts, the ashamed and
hungover

Amen for the calloused, the wisened, the sober

Amen for the ones who want life to be over

Amen for the leaders who lose their composure

Amen for the parents who just lost their baby

Amen for the chronically ill and disabled

Amen for the children down at the border

Amen for the victims of our law and order

*I pray that you're heard
and I pray that this works*

*I pray if a prayer has been used as a sword
against you and your heart, against you and your
word*

I pray that this prayer is a plowshare, of sorts