

Isaiah 2:1-5

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Samantha Evans

December 1, 2019

## Tools for Community

Well good morning, my friends, Advent Tidings to you all! I hope and pray that y'all had a good Thanksgiving. I know this can be a hard season for many of us, so I just pray that you all know how much you are loved and how grateful I am for all of you and for this community.

As we enter into this holiday season, the beginning of the Christian calendar, and prepare for Christmas, I just want to acknowledge there is so much to do and consider. And so my hope every single year is that we are willing and able to take some time to stop and reflect, to extend gratitude and lean into our relationships, to just remember that this season, which comes around year after year, is a time when we as Christians are called to remember how our story began, to recommit ourselves to our community and our God, to seek to live into the peace and joy and faith and love that God promises the world.

And so, I've been thinking about the ways God is inviting us to do this. To live into the reality that God is creating. This text from Isaiah, where weapons of war are transformed into farming tools, has me thinking about small and large ways that we can walk in the light of the LORD in this way.

I've been reflecting on the many objects in our lives that can be used as weapons, to tear us down and rip us apart. And I've been considering how we might transform those weapons into tools that build us up and bind us together.<sup>1</sup>

This year, for Thanksgiving, my partner and I invited our friends, who live in Oakland, to come to our house to spend the day together. To cook together. And to eat and drink and play games. And just enjoy one another.

And I'll tell you that I love hosting people. I love creating beautiful spaces and serving food that you make you feel good. I like making fancy drinks. I love welcoming people in and inviting them to make themselves at home. I love making people feel happy and cared for.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea comes from: "This transformational image has fueled the imagination of many generations. It is the inspiration for a large sculpture that stands outside the General Assembly tower at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The hope is that through the cooperation of nations, the tools of community can replace the weapons of war." Bruce C. Birch, "Exegetical Perspective," *Feasting on the Word: Year A*.

And sometimes, because I have perfectionist tendencies and an unhealthy dose of anxiety, sometimes this love for hosting shifts from a tool for community to a weapon of war. And if any of you suffer from anxiety, then you know that the war is waged almost entirely within your own head, so it can be quite a battleground.

A to-do list turns into a minefield. And I feel like if I make one misstep, then everything is ruined. Last week, Mary Jo told a story about her Thanksgiving table, which she spends lots of time setting. To make a beautiful space for her guests. But when her kids kicked a ball onto, well, that ball became a weapon of mass destruction.

I am thankful that she shared this story last week, because as I was setting my own table this past week, it just wasn't looking like I wanted it to, I remembered her story. And then as I was trying to cut the skin and fat off some salmon (we don't like turkey), and it wasn't going so well, I remembered her story.

I remembered that the decorations were meant to remind us of the promise of harvest and hope for wholeness, and the salmon was meant to nourish our bodies and comfort our souls, and so it didn't make any sense to weaponize these tools for community in a war against myself.

Do any of you ever fall into these kinds of traps? Do you ever feel like you take beautiful gifts and turn them into weapons against yourself or against those you love? Do you ever become overwhelmed with anxiety that something you do isn't good enough? Or do you ever wage war with your loved ones when things aren't going exactly according to plan?

As humans, we're really good at this. We know war well. Our lives are impacted and shaped by war and conflict. We want to be a peaceful people, living in harmony with one another, but the world is so full of violence and anxiety and strife, that it feels impossible to escape it completely. And so, we seek out moments, tiny glimpses of conflict-free living, that recharge us and reassure us that peace and harmony are possible. That there is life after war and anxiety.

The prophet Isaiah promises that a time will surely come when people from all over the world will travel to the mountain of God, to be instructed in the ways of God: the ways of peace and justice and love. And when that day comes, everything will change.

I am most moved by the promise of this text. The promise that there will come a time when these seemingly endless wars will finally cease. The promise that a day

will come when people no longer learn war. And where even if they were given a lesson on war, there wouldn't be any tools to wage it.

These weapons of war, which are used to divide and conquer, will become tools for community. Tools which build up and bind the people together. Soldiers will be transformed into farmers, swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. People and energy and tools that were scarce when all of the community's resources were being diverted to war.

Can you imagine what we could do as a nation to build up our communities with the \$698.5 billion budgeted for the military in 2019? Can you imagine the homes and parks, the education system, or the infrastructure we could build?

Can you imagine what our society would look like if we transformed our fear of the other into love for the stranger? If we welcomed the immigrant and the refugee? If we honored and valued cultures different from our own?

Can you imagine what our lives would be like if we denounced perfectionism? If we shed our anxiety and our inclination to wage war with ourselves and our family and friends, whom we love?

Can you imagine what our world would be like if we ceased to learn war?

The prophet Isaiah promises that this time will come and when it does, the goal of society and humankind will be transformed from domination and greed to collaboration and generosity. Sister, brother, and sibling will be bound together and committed to a vision of the world where all people have healthy food and clean water. All people are treated with dignity and love. All people can thrive, become whole and healthy, and grow fully into the beautiful children God created them to be.

Sometimes it feels like this vision is just too grandiose. Like these dreams of peaceful people and healthy communities are simply beyond our grasp. Like there is little we can do in the face of our violent reality.

And sometimes, I think it feels silly even trying to imagine that the many, many weapons of war that exist in our society could ever be completely destroyed. That people could ever truly stop learning war and live in peace.

We know that the holiday season is abundantly full of opportunities to wage war. Abundantly full. The grace is that on this first Sunday in Advent, the message is not

one of reprimand, it is one of invitation. It is an invitation to walk in the light of the LORD, right here and right now, in any and all of the ways that we possibly can.

This Advent season, we are invited to be tender with ourselves. To be patient with our children and our partners, kind to our acquaintances, and generous to those in need.

We are invited to be a people who believe that it is possible for war to cease and community to thrive. A people who will not be overcome with anxiety and fear.

A people who will walk in the light of the LORD. And with each step, will seek to transform weapons of war, which divide and destroy, into tools for community.

Tools which bind up the brokenhearted, build up the family of God, and bring about peace and harmony, love and joy, for all the world.

In the name of the Triune God, who Creates, Sustains, and Redeems us all. AMEN.