

2nd Advent (2022)

Isaiah 11:1-10

Dec 4, 2022

Order of Service for December 4, 2022

Prelude: Rhonda and Sharon

Welcome and announcements

Lighting the Advent Candle: VT #916

Special Music: "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"

Nicole Tiessen, Brent Guenther, Macaila Funk, Joel Dreidger

Call to worship

Gathering hymn: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" VT #218

Lighting of the Peace Lamp

Children's Time

Special Music: Sharon and Rhonda

Joys and Concerns

Congregational Prayer

Special Music: "What Child Is This" Nicole, Brent, Macaila, Joel

Scripture: Isaiah 11: 1-10

Hymn "Poor of the Earth" VT 213

Sermon: "Hope for a Just Peace" Patrick Preheim

Sending hymn: "Maranatha, Come" STS #2

Benediction

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Hope for a Just Peace

I begin this sermon with a less than peace-filled story. I was up early one day listening to the BBC program, *From Our Own Correspondents*. One of their reporters from the occupied Palestinian Territories (Yolande Knell, I believe) shared her experience in an area near Hebron called Masafer Yatta.¹ The land in question is one in which Bedouin and Palestinians have historically used. The shepherds wish to graze their flocks as they have done for centuries and the farmers want to plant and harvest their crops.

The non-profit humanitarian groups I follow do not mince word. One with whom I have periodic email correspondence puts it this way. The occupying army has “conveniently designated Masafer Yatta a firing zone to steal the land. That’s been the case for some years now. They do military drills in villages, destroy olive groves, demolish houses, demolish crops, steal and poison livestock, poison wells as well. It’s awful. On November 22nd, for example, they demolished a new school. Check out this video link from the Institute for Middle East Understanding if you doubt.”² It reminded me of a poem authored by David Waltner-Toews entitled “Christmas, 1974”.

Christmas, 1974

Have you not heard his silent steps?

He comes, comes, ever comes.

R.Tagore

winter night in Palestine
clean and cold as polished steel

arabs rest their sheep
among rocks and thistles
like patches of scruffy spring snow

¹ [The Palestinians facing mass eviction in the West Bank - BBC News](#)

² [IMEU on Instagram: "This morning, Israeli soldiers destroyed a Palestinian school in Masafer Yatta as children and families pleaded with them to stop. Before Israeli soldiers bulldozed the school, they threw stun grenades into classrooms with children still inside who were forced to escape through the windows. Outside, members of the Palestinian community stood together in front of the building in an attempt to prevent the soldiers from knocking it down, but Israeli soldiers destroyed the school anyway. Masafer Yatta is a Palestinian community home to over 1,000 people that Israel is actively trying to wipe off the map. Most residents are farmers and shepherds using what little means they have to resist Israel's efforts to force them out of their homes and off their land. Even children aren't safe from Israel's violence in Masafer Yatta as the Israeli military destroys their schools, homes, and more. No child should have to escape from the windows of their classroom to flee stun grenades. No child should have to watch as their school is bulldozed to the ground. Like all children, Palestinian children deserve freedom and a safe education—that's not possible under Israeli apartheid. Videos via : Quds News Network, @ItaiFeitelson via Twitter, and @btselem"](#)

on the hillside

somewhere behind them
in a desert cave
a small fire holds the vengeant night
at bay

men and women commune with clammy handshakes
and guns: the bread of death

below the shepherds
Israeli soldiers patrol the occupied city
stop to fidget at a small bar
a sign at the city gate reads:
 All arabs must register
 with the military authorities
 in the city of their birth

the shepherds, remembering the sign
joke about it
they were born in tents
they do not leave their sheep

suddenly a rocket
sleek as a sacrificial blade
splits the belly of silence above them
exploding, shrieking into the streets below
the streets answer with gunfire rattle
boots running on concrete
trucks
searchlights against the hills

the shepherds huddle behind a rock
their sheep are bleating, bleating
more rattle of guns

the bleating stops

lights out, motors choke into silence
boots stomp back to the bar

nervous laughter curls up like smoke
incense to the unspeaking
mask of night

down a cobbled alley
from the bar
in a small lean-to
anxious, calloused hands
are pushing some goats away
from their manger
nearby, on a bed of dirty straw
a Palestinian woman groans
pushing with all her prayerful might
against the pain in her belly

David Waltner-Toews (from *The Earth is One Body* 34-35)

Has nothing changed in nearly fifty years? Has nothing changed in two thousand years? No, not much has changed. As we come to terms with dissonance in our lives and world, we find ourselves longing and aching for the visions of peace promised so long ago. I have hope for a just peace, in part, because our biblical narratives underscore that it is to such a place as Masafet Yatta that God has chosen to become incarnate. The Waltner-Toews poem taps into this aspect of the biblical narrative. Jesus was born under Roman occupation. Isaiah's vision for a peaceable kingdom came for people living under Assyrian domination. One will come with wisdom, righteousness, and a sense of justice to set things right. We often focus on the 1st century Roman occupation; let us take a closer look at Isaiah 11.

Isaiah 11 is dated to a time (8th century BCE) when the dreaded Assyrian army was rolling down the Mediterranean coast. The Assyrians were a war machine. They completely wiped out the ten northern tribes of Israel: deporting them, assimilating them, executing them or forcing them as refugees into Judah. Judah, for its part under King Ahaz, had become a vassal state devoting most of its GDP to the Assyrians.³ Jesse's stump, political and religious self-determination for God's people, had been slashed at the ground. It was likely an olive tree, an icon of peace (how ironic), because olive trees have been known to spring shoots from nothing but roots. That sawn off and charred stump of Jesse is not dead. Everything above ground has been laid waste, but the branch (a metaphor for political and spiritual renewal), will grow again. To a devastated people, God is bringing one who will put an end to our historic conflicts (represented in the pairing of predators

³ John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* in the "Word Biblical Commentary series volume 24, (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1985), p.171.

and prey). No more hurt or destruction on all my holy mountain. No more hurt or destruction. No more.

There is hope for a just peace in all the occupied territories. There is hope for Ukraine. There is hope for Syria. There is hope for the occupied West Bank. There is hope for Somalia. There is hope for South Sudan. There is hope for those in the refugee camps. There is hope those stuck in the barrios and slums of our cities and reserves. There is hope for those bound by addictions and depressions. There is hope because this is where God chooses to be born again and again—in those places where there is unrest and dis-ease.

If you do not believe me, it is worth retelling sections of Yan Martel's story as it appeared in the StarPhoenix on Saturday, Nov 19th.⁴ Martel, along with Annette Epp, participated in the Sanctum fundraiser earlier in November. Many of us have read his account, but not all. In either case, important tales bear repeating.

Earlier in November...seven concerned citizens and I participated in Sanctum Care Group's Winter Challenge, which means that for 36 hours I lived as if I were homeless. I wore donated clothes and walked around 20th Street with no ID and no money in my pockets, experiencing for a short time the difficulties that homeless people experience every day, for days and weeks on end... There are services out there, for sure, but if you are suffering from addiction or mental health [concerns] [or] if you [struggle with] literacy, those services are very hard to access.

To give you one example, I went to the Mental Health & Addiction Services offices in the Sturdy Stone Building. I told the receptionist I was homeless and needed help with my issues. She directed me to a small room with a table, a chair and a phone. On the table were instructions to call one of two numbers to start the intake process. Well, no matter how many times I called those numbers, I got the same message, telling me to leave a message with my name, phone number and the service I was requesting. How many homeless people have phone numbers? Should I have left the number of that phone there, in that small room?...The experience left me entirely stymied and unhelped.

Another example: if you don't have ID, lost it long ago [you will].. need it to access the Food Bank,...or to sign up for the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability, or the Saskatchewan Income Support. Well, good luck with that. You need \$35 for a birth certificate, you need an email address...and you need an address where you can receive mail. Each of those is an obstacle that

⁴ [Yann Martel: Brief Saskatoon homeless experience yields vital lessons | The Star Phoenix](#)

can be overcome, but imagine if you're barely keeping it together because the misery of your life.

But there were moments of grace. While waiting to get into The Bridge, where I had a good hot lunch and could have taken a shower, I met Jay and his girlfriend, whose name I didn't catch. They didn't know where they were sleeping that night..., but they were smiling and laughing. They had each other. They looked like a happy couple. When you've got nothing, you're left with the greatest wealth of all: people...

[As it was getting dark], I went to the Dr. Freda Ahenakew Library. I decided I would spend the evening there until closing time, 9 p.m. That was my strategy. I sat at a table and tried to start a book or two. When I decided to have my supper, the free take-out lunch I had got earlier in the day from the Friendship Inn... I went out and sat on the floor of the vestibule of the library, not as warm as inside the library but certainly warmer than outside. I had eaten my sandwich and drunk my cold soup when from the corner of my eyes I saw the library security guard coming my way. I thought for sure he was going to kick me out. No eating in the library, that's the rule. Not at all. In a soft voice, he told me I was welcome to eat my meal inside the library. I couldn't believe my ears. The kindness brought tears to my eyes. I returned to the table I had been sitting at and ate my muffin. Security guard, I didn't get your name either, like Jay's girlfriend's, but thank you for the love.

Over and over, I met people who showed me the respect and dignity that poverty and homelessness so quickly strip you of. That's how we begin to deal with homelessness in our city, by re-humanizing people from whom so much has been taken. Homelessness is not a cancer. It's the suffering of fellow citizens, and if we don't help them, we're all brought down, the homeless and everyone around them, residents, business owners, the city, everyone...

If you're wondering what you can do, I have a few suggestions. You can donate money, no matter how little. You can donate your time. You can donate things you don't need. Go to [One Small Step](#). It's a website that showcases fifty Saskatoon charities, what they do, and what they need. And you can also just give a smile the next time you see someone who is homeless. There, but for the grace of God or your parents or your systemic privilege or your luck, go you, go any of us.

We are sensitized to that hoped for peace when in spaces of difficulty. We look for it with thirsting souls and spirits. We do a disservice to the concept of hope,

especially biblical hope, when we sugar coat Christmas and the realities with which we live.

As I conclude this sermon, I wish to highlight a very important dimension of our scripture text from Isaiah. It is, in the end, God's project. The branch, anointed with the spirit of the LORD (v. 2), comes in God's way and God's time. That is what we find in both Isaiah 11 and the coming of Jesus Christ. Too often many of us well meaning Christians berate ourselves for not having made earth like heaven. We beat ourselves up because we can't keep the wolves from snacking on the lambs; we despair because despite our best efforts there is still hurt perpetrated upon God's holy mountain and upon those created in the image of God. We do the best we can. In the end we are invited to pursue that which makes for peace and mutual upbuilding (Rm 14:19). But this endeavour is bigger than us. We do well to train our eyes to the advent, the coming of Christ again, wherever it is we find ourselves. And we pray for wisdom how best to partner with God in the on-going work of bringing healing and peace to all peoples, languages, and nations. Amen.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church