**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**The First Sunday in Advent
December 1, 2019**

**Isaiah 2: 1-5**

If you visit the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and you go to the North Gardens, you will find a large bronze sculpture of a rather muscular man. He is holding a massive hammer aloft in one hand and a sword in the other which he is reshaping into a ploughshare. Called, *“Let Us Beat Our Swords into Ploughshares,”* the sculpture was donated to the U.N. in 1959 by the Russian government. It is meant to symbolize the lofty goals of the U.N. and to stand as an edifice to man’s efforts to put an end to war forever. The idea was that by nations working cooperatively together, peace could reign and thus we could eventually eliminate the need for instruments of war.

 That is a noble goal and since its origins in 1945, the U.N. has kept the pursuit of world peace as its charter. World peace is the very reason the organization exists. That said, it kind of begs the question: how have they done? Well, let’s do some accounting. Since the inception of the U.N., the United States alone as seen the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, the Bosnian War, the War in Kosovo, the Gulf War, the War in Afghanistan and the Iraqi War. That’s just the United States. What about other countries? Since 1945 England has fought in the Malayan War, the Korean War, the Suez Canal War, the Kenyan War, the Cyprus War, the Aden War, the War in Borneo, the Viet Nam War, the War in Sierra Leone, the Gulf War, the War in Afghanistan and the War in Iraq. And that is just Great Britain!

 In fact, since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, according to the Peace Pledge Union, the number of armed conflicts around the world has actually increased with, on average, the world seeing at least 30 armed conflict occurring at any given time. How has the United Nations been doing in its pursuit of peace? Apparently not so well.

 The truth is that man has never been very good at peace. Before the U.N. there was the League of Nations which was established to promote, *“international cooperation and to achieve peace and security.”* Do you know why it fell apart? World War II.

 Prior to them, back in 1899, the International Peace Conference met at The Hague with the goal of seeking ways to peacefully prevent wars. Can you guess why it fell apart? You guessed it, World War I, the war to end all wars, started.

 My dear friends in Christ, I promise I am not just being cynical here . . .ok, maybe I am just a little . . . but all of these organizations bit way more off than they could chew. I hate to say it but war and conflict are in our genetics. Think about it, within one generation of man’s creation what do we see? Cain murdering his brother Abel. Since then we have only seen conflict and bloodshed escalate. In truth, since the dawn of man, peace has been ever elusive.

 Peace was ever elusive for the people of Israel as well. Now, if there was ever a nation that had seen more than its fair share of warfare and fighting between nations, it was Israel. In fact, if you read through the Old Testament, so much of it revolves around Israel’s struggles with its neighbors. Read through the Book of Joshua. There we see Israel fighting the battle of Jericho, the battle at Ai, the battle against the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites. There were battles against the kings of Hazor, Madon and Shimron. By the time Israel actually settle into the promised land, they had fought and defeated thirty-one kings and this just in the life time of one man, Joshua.

 But that didn’t end it for Israel. King David was always in battle. First he fought the Jebusites, then the Philistines, then Moabites, then . . . well, I could keep on going but you can get the summary by reading 2 Samuel 8. The kings that followed David didn’t fare any better. In fact, they even began to fight amongst themselves eventually splitting the nation between north and south.

 By the time you get to Isaiah’s day, the people were tired. It was a time of great political upheaval. The nation of Assyria to the north was growing in power and expanding their territories. They had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and now, Judah in the south lived under the constant threat of war with what was without a doubt the world power at the time militarily speaking. If the nation of Assyria knew anything, it knew warfare. They were the first to use iron for weapons, they were the first to develop a calvary and the first to develop the chariot, putting sharpened blades on the wheels to mow down their enemies. Judah, seemed and easy conquest both in the eyes of Assyria and the people of Judah themselves. Would they ever see peace? When would all the warfare end?

 We could ask the same question, I suppose. When you think about it, Israel’s history is not that unlike ours. Since my birth in 1959, do you know how many years the United States has seen where we were involved in no conflict in the world? Two. 1976-1978. That’s it. In sixty years, only two years of relative peace. And what about you who are a bit older than I am? Do you remember a time when there was no war or what we like to euphemistically call, *“a police action?”* I bet you can’t.

 My dear friends in Christ, that the world has never seen peace since the dawn of creation is probably the most severe indictment on mankind’s sin that could be made. From the very beginning, after Adam and Eve sinned, we have not been wonting to find reasons to kill and hate each other. The fact that the first murder occurred within one generation of human beings being created illustrates the depth of the problem. Cain not only took the life of Abel, he took the life of Abel his brother and the long line of conflicts between human beings has continued ever since. And these conflicts are both great and small. Boarder disputes don’t only occur between nations; they occur over the backyard fence as well. We have all fought individually with our neighbors, our siblings, our friends, our children and our spouses. And we have fought collectively as a nation against other nations. Actually, let me rephrase that because using the term *“nation,”* I believe, depersonalizes conflict. We have fought collectively as people against other people. Will we ever see peace?

 The answer to that, my dear friends in Christ, is yes. Actually, Isaiah gives us an emphatic, *“yes!”* But it will not come by our efforts to demilitarize or to negotiate peace treaties. It will come by the hand of God.

 God plans peace for us and for this world and that is the hopeful message that Isaiah brings to us today. As we begin this Advent season and we look forward to the celebration of the birth of our Lord, Isaiah gives us a glimpse into what God has in store for all who believe and just exactly the peace he plans to bring to us *“in those days.”*

 Isaiah tell us that in the latter days, meaning, the end times, the house of the Lord will be established as the highest mountain and shall be lifted up above the other mountains. Now, when Isaiah says that God’s mountain shall be the highest mountain, he in not talking about altitude here. His point is not that God will be able to look down from his mountain and see the peak of Mt. Everest below him. No. This is a supremacy thing. He is saying that the Lord’s mountain will be elevated and exalted above all things. At the end of time, God will be acknowledged by all people as the one, true and only God. All false gods will be shown for what they are: puny, tiny, anthills that are worthless. All those things in which man has placed his trust, like nations, governments, armies and false religions will be brought low. Our triune God will be high and lifted up. He will establish his reign of peace throughout the land.

 That in and of itself is good news but Isaiah wants us to know the completeness of what God has in store for us. Isaiah tell us that all nations, all peoples will flow to him. There is a wonderful bit of symbolism here in Isaiah: he pictures a river of people flowing uphill. And not only does it flow uphill to the house of the Lord, they will come from the four corners of the world.

 My dear friends in Christ, here is the first sign that God plans to bring peace to us. Think of all the things that have always divided people in this world and caused conflict. Nationality, language, race, skin color. People have been using such things as excuses to hate and to fight for thousands of years. Doesn’t it seem that every nation hates another nation for some reason or other? We hate the French because, well . . . they’re French. The French hate us because we’re Americans. And think of all the atrocities that have occurred over race and skin color. Think of all the racial conflicts we have seen in our nation’s history. Think of all the harm that has been done, all the insulting words that have been levied and all the hateful acts committed over something as stupid as skin color.

 Here is how ridiculous racism is: remember earlier I mentioned that Cain not only murdered Abel, he murdered Abel his brother. The truth is that we are all one race of people: the human race. We all have the same parentage: Adam and Eve. We are all related as human beings. In the latter days, all these things which we think make a difference, will make no difference. We will, as Isaiah shows, with joy, walk hand and hand to the mountain of our God not as enemies but as the brothers and sisters we truly are.

 And why in the latter days will nationality, language, race and skin color make no difference? Because they will have in common the one, true God. All believers will unite, leaving all their differences behind as they invite and encourage one another, *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his way and that we may walk in his paths.”* Imagine what Isaiah is telling us here. God’s people will clamor to learn from God and to hear his word. It’s hard to imagine because we have a hard time filling Bible studies now, but the day is coming when all believers will hang on every syllable that comes from the mouth of God.

 Is that not good news? Of course it is but this gets even better as Isaiah spells out the most direct promise of peace God give us. *“And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they war anymore.”* Let those words sink in. The day is surely coming when the implements of war will be obsolete. There will be no conflict and so there will be no need for swords or spears. I suppose the application for us today would that there will be no need for guns, or rifles, or tanks, or grenades, or smart bombs or any of the myriad weapons we now use for death. Instead, these implements will be turned into tools for man’s prosperity, plowshares and pruning hooks; things for life not death.

 Thomas Jefferson once wrote*, “Those who hammer their guns into plowshares will plow for those who don’t.”* Sorry Mr. Jefferson, in the latter days there will be no room for such cynicism. As hard as it is to believe that peace will reign, it will. And although I believe that Isaiah is speaking metaphorically here, the text shows us that God will give us the privilege taking these implements of war and beating them into tools of peace. Notice, he doesn’t say that God will destroy them, he says instead, “*They shall beat their swords into plowshares.”* That “*they*” is you and me.

Will we ever see peace? Is this world Isaiah shows us hard to believe? Is a life free from conflict hard to picture? Think of never seeing a soldier go off to war again. Think of never seeing a flag-draped casket again. Think of never fighting with your neighbor, with your family, with anyone ever again. That’s the future God promises. All conflict will go away. All of it.

 How? Well, Isaiah does not tell us in the immediate context of this text but he does tell us elsewhere he does so with great clarity. In Isaiah 7, he tells us that the virgin shall bear a son and call his name, *“Immanuel. Which is ‘God with us.’”* In Isaiah 9, he tells us of the child that is born to us who will be called “*Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* In Isaiah 49 he announces the servant who will restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles. And, of course, there is Isaiah 53 where we read that God’s Servant would be, *“pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.”*

 Isaiah is, of course, speaking of Christ Jesus our Savior and with his birth, peace came into the world. That is what Christmas is all about. It is about peace coming to us (God with us) through a child born in a manger.

 And this peace of which Isaiah speaks is not just something we are waiting for in the future. We have already begun to experience it now. Jesus has won for us the most important peace, that is, peace with God. That comes first in God’s plans. Jesus would first go to the cross to end the hostilities, the conflict that existed between us and God. He would take the sin that belongs to us and causes God’s anger, place them on his shoulders and die for them by hanging on a cross. He would see his own life end in violence and bloodshed, accepting unspeakable hostility as a people who did not know him scourged and nailed him to a tree so that all violence might cease.

 It is ironic that our Prince of Peace died so violently to end violence, yet, as we look at the cross, we see that this instrument of violence is the greatest symbol of peace this world has seen. In the cross, we see that the problem of sin has been dealt with and God, for the sake of Christ, will restore the world so that it is filled not with strife and conflict, but peace and harmony.

 My dear friends in Christ, because of Jesus, this world which Isaiah describes, is what awaits us. It will be a world of total peace. No fighting. No conflict. No war. *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,”* and get in line to grab a hammer because we have some plowshares to make! To God be the Glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.