

St. John's Lutheran  
December 2, 2007

"Peace"  
Isaiah 2:1-5

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

When the Christ child was born in a stable in Bethlehem, and laid in a manger on the very first Christmas, the event had global implications. The birth of a new king had very much to do with the relationship between the nations of the world and the relationship between the peoples of the nations of the world. For it is a fact that even in Biblical times the peoples of the nations of the world did not get along. And war was a fact of life for many, many people, as it continues to be today.

What does the Bible say about war? Is there, we might ask, a distinctly "Christian" point of view, either for or against war? The answer, of course, is no. There is no one distinctly "Christian" point of view in regard to war. War, in fact, has been one of the dynamics of human society that has often divided the Christian community, believer against believer, in terms of what the people think and believe about war.

On the one hand, there are Christians who are pacifists. Although even within the over-all philosophy of pacifism there are differing points of view, generally speaking the theory of pacifism is the theory that peaceful rather than violent or belligerent relations should govern human intercourse. In this line of thinking, all disputes are to be resolved by non-violent means, means such as various forms of arbitration or even ultimate surrender.

On the other hand, there are Christians who are proponents of what has been called "Just War Theory". This is a very distinct philosophy of war that accepts war as a necessary evil under certain conditions. And it is very specific as to when war is warranted, how war is to be fought, and what is to be the result after victory in war has been accomplished.

There is, however, across the spectrum of Christian thinking about war one point upon which all would probably agree. And that is that being at war is not God's ideal plan for humankind. God did not create humankind to be at war with one another. It is not too much to say that war is always an occasion for sadness in the heart of a good and gracious God who so loves the whole world.

The absence of war is peace among the nations. It is peace among the nations, then, that is the goal of God for all humankind. It was for peace that humankind was created. It is to be at peace that God desires all nations to be. And it is not too much to say that, in part, it was peace among the nations that the first Christmas was all about. There are many passages throughout the Bible that offer peace as God's vision for humankind. One of the books of the Bible that makes a strong presentation for God's desire that humankind would live in peace is the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah lived in an uneasy time politically and militarily. Isaiah lived after the time of disagreement that had included civil war in Israel. The result was that Israel had divided into two kingdoms – Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Isaiah lived in the south and served as a prophet to the kings and the people of Judah to the south. The words before us this morning in our first reading, from the second chapter of Isaiah, were spoken as Judah lived uneasily between the armies of Israel to the north and the monster neighboring empires of Egypt and Assyria.

During this uneasy time, when it seemed that war was very likely and that Judah would very likely not fair well in any war that might come upon them, Isaiah spoke a word of reassurance to the people of Judah. The word of reassurance was a word about God's ultimate plan for the nations of the world. The word of reassurance was a pretty radical word. The word of reassurance was that there would come a day when the nations of the world would live together in peace and harmony.

The most well-known of these words are the ones spoken in verse 4 of our reading this morning where Isaiah declares that ultimately it will be the Lord who "shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Isaiah sees a time that is yet to come when, figuratively speaking, the nations will take their implements of war and make them into implements of agriculture. And the peoples of the world shall live together in peace.

As we look forward to the celebration of Christmas, 2007, it is a good thing to keep this promise before us. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas this year, it is a good thing to be reminded that it was for this that

Christ was born. In order that the peoples of the nations might live together in peace.

We do not yet live in this time. This time of peace is yet to come. It is the peace among the peoples of the nations of the world that was ultimately made possible through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus into the heavenly kingdom. And it is the sure and certain hope of the peoples of the nations of the world living together in peace in the kingdom of heaven that we keep in our hearts as we prepare for the celebration of Christmas this Advent, 2007. Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep our hearts.