

December 8, 2013

If you could dream for a perfect world, what would it look like? Both the ancient prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul have left us with their versions. What they have in common is the conviction of a world marked by peace and harmony. They spoke not of a pipe dream but of a course of action to be followed. As we read these passages in our time we hear the echo of the life of Jesus in both.

Isaiah 11: 1-10

In a time of corrupt kings and military disasters the people of Israel were open to some good news about their future. Isaiah offers them a vision of peace that will penetrate the political and natural world led by a child. God's renewal of the earth will be marked by peace not victory. Listen to this dream of a better world.

¹A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump,
from his roots a budding Branch.
²The life-giving Spirit of GOD will hover over him,
the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
the Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-GOD.
³Fear-of-GOD
will be all his joy and delight.
He won't judge by appearances,
won't decide on the basis of hearsay.
⁴He'll judge the needy by what is right,
render decisions on earth's poor with justice.
His words will bring everyone to awed attention.
A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.
⁵Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.
A LIVING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD
⁶The wolf will romp with the lamb,
the leopard sleep with the kid.
Calf and lion will eat from the same trough,
and a little child will tend them.
⁷Cow and bear will graze the same pasture,
their calves and cubs grow up together,
and the lion eat straw like the ox.
⁸The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens,
the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent.
⁹Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill
on my holy mountain.
The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive,

a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

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¹⁰On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the peoples. The nations will all come to him. His headquarters will be glorious.

Romans 15: 4-7, 12-13

Paul offers a practical solution to a very real problem. The Christian community in Rome was divided between Gentile converts and Jewish converts. The Gentile group was much larger and had a reputation for treating their Jewish-Christian neighbours badly. Paul urges them to live in harmony – to seek good for others and not simply for yourself. Being gracious, forgiving and tolerant are to be the hallmarks of the Christian Community. This is what divine peace is to look like in our time. Here are Paul's words.

⁴Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for *us*. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize *us*, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. ⁵May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. ⁶Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

⁷So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now *you* do it!

¹²And Isaiah's word:

There's the root of our ancestor Jesse,
breaking through the earth and growing tree tall,
Tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope!

¹³Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon – “The world God's way – pipe dream or promise?”

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable (which I was introduced to in South Africa!)

Pipedream: An impossible imaginary and fanciful hope or plan indulged in at one's ease when smoking a pipe. (originated with opium smoking)

Today we are invited to imagine a world of perfect peace.

Your first impulse may be to laugh → it is too ridiculous for words!

Look at Syria, Israel, Congo, Winnipeg's North end gangs, think back 24 years to the massacre at Ecole Polytechnique in MH... I could go on and on.

Peace – a pipe dream – right? Yes or no?

We began today with just a fragment of the legacy of Chief Seattle who placed himself between tribes and colonists and believed that they could live in harmony but we must share the resources of this earth so that all can thrive.

Both our passages from Isaiah and Romans come from times that were conspicuously absent of peace.

Assyria had overrun Israel's incompetent kings and no-one was safe.

In Rome, the Gentile-Christian majority was filling the Jewish-Christians with terror.

Yet, they are about peace -> a vision for peace and a prescription of how to get there.

The world mourns the passing of Nelson Mandela this week.

It is probably no coincidence that two of the most revered proponents of peace came from South Africa – Mandela and Gandhi.

Think about Isaiah's vision for peace – it is idyllic yet, John Holbert who teaches preaching at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas sees it this way:

So, according to Isaiah, that is the sort of king we await. No sentimental, greeting card baby, leading a crowd of frolicking beasts through a green meadow. We wait a doer of justice, a purveyor of righteousness for those who have very little of either, making our world unfair at its base, unequal in its distribution of goods, a world where 2 billion of its people try to live on less than a dollar a day. In short, our world awaits this king, too. www.patheos.com

Mandela was not perfect but he was persistent – he was righteous and just and as Paul told his bickering Roman audience, he was convinced that he must work with the very people with who he disagreed!!

He said this when he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 with F.W. deKlerk.

"The value of our shared reward will and must be measured by the joyful peace which will triumph, because the common humanity which bonds both black and white into one human race, will have said to each one of us that we shall all live like the children of paradise. Thus shall we live, because we will have created a society which recognizes that all people are born equal, with each entitled in equal measure to life, liberty, prosperity, human rights and good governance. Such a society should never allow again that there should be prisoners of conscience not that any person's human right should be violated." Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, 1993.

What struck me as I read through several of Mandela's notable speeches was the extent to which he echoed the vision of Isaiah and Paul for peace.

Paul insisted that peace must be founded on hospitality, welcome, tolerance and acceptance.

This harmony/unity is at the core of Jesus' theology.

It is part of our identity as Christian believers.

I found a Top 10 quotes of Mandela on newsone.com.

On his quest for peace – pipe dream?

“It always seems impossible until it's done.”

“If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.”

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

The quest for peace is our call as Christians.

It is a daring and extravagant goal.

But it is only through our work for peace that we experience God's hope for creation and how we offer real hope to others.

Perhaps world peace seems a daunting task to you personally but let me share one last quote from Mandela.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

This is why we have been partners in the preschool in Gonubie, South Africa.

Why we have paid tuition, supported the meal program, built a library, and repaired their playground and sunshade.

Peace begins with how we treat each other => Christian faith => respect for all people, freedom for all, dignity and security for all => this is Christ-like living NOT a pipe dream.