

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

“PEACE ON EARTH”

A SERMON PREACHED BY  
REV. THAD AUSTIN

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT  
28 NOVEMBER 2010

### TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Isa 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,  
'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 ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

### OTHER SCRIPTURES ABOUT PEACE

Numbers 25:12 Therefore, announce: 'I am going to give to him my covenant of peace.

Psalms 72:3 The mountains will bring news of peace to the people, and the hills will announce justice.

Numbers 6:26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Isaiah 9:6 For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called: Extraordinary Strategist, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 59:8 They are unfamiliar with peace; their deeds are unjust. They use deceitful methods, and whoever deals with them is unfamiliar with peace.

Lamentations 3:17 I am deprived of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is.

Ezekiel 37:26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be a perpetual covenant with them. I will establish them, increase their numbers, and place my sanctuary among them forever.

Malachi 2:5 "My covenant with him was designed to bring life and peace. I gave its statutes to him to fill him with awe, and he indeed revered me and stood in awe before me.

Luke 12:51 do not come to bring peace.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.

John 16:33 I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage - I have conquered the world."

1 Corinthians 14:33 for God is not characterized by disorder but by peace. As in all the churches of the

saints,

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful.

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness, for without it no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ,

Hebrews 13:21 equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

1 Peter 3:11 And he must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.

2 Peter 1:2 May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!

“Peace on Earth”

*Introduction: A PEACE THAT DID NOT LAST*

One of the most unique events of the Civil War occurred right here in Murfreesboro on a cold, damp, and dreary night in late December 1862. It was then that 83,000 Confederate and Federal troops were camped along the Stones River less than six miles from where we stand today. On the evening before battle, a band from one of the armies broke out into a popular patriotic song. The band’s music carried easily through the night’s chilled air to the other side’s camp, only 700 yards away. When the song that the band was playing ended, the band from the other side began played a tune of its own. The two armies exchanged music like this through out the night. They played songs like "Bonny Blue Flag," "Hail, Columbia," "Yankee Doodle," and "Dixie." But eventually, these “lively [. . . songs] faded as one band [began to play the] the lonesome strains of [the song] “Home Sweet Home.” Almost instinctively, musicians wearing blue and grey played the song together and soldiers from both sides of the conflict sang along. For a moment, the war stopped, and for a night, there was peace on the battlefield.

It was just a few days after Christmas, and these men, calloused by war, were reminded of their families, their homes, and the holiday that had just passed. Many of the troops probably felt like Constantine Hege, a soldier from North Carolina. On his first Christmas of the war, he wrote in a letter to his family, "[. . .] twelve months ago I was home where I could enjoy the blessings of a comfortable house and home of parents and friends[. . .], but this Christmas I am surrounded by warriors, cannons, and guns[. . . .]"

I imagine that the men here in Murfreesboro on that cold December night hoped that this evening of peace would never end. But it did.

When dawn broke “Home Sweet Home” was replaced by the familiar sounds of war and death. Only a few hours after the men exchanged familiar tunes, they exchanged lethal fire. Regretfully, the peace that the soldiers experienced that night here Murfreesboro did not last. But the Bible speaks of a peace that will.

*Isaiah's World: A PEACE THAT WILL NEVER END*

In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet describes a vision of peace on earth. As our guide, Isaiah takes us to a mountain elevated above all of the hills of the world. This mountain, called Zion, is lifted up and exalted as a beacon of hope and light. It is taller than all of the mountains surrounding it. It seems to reach heaven. Standing there gazing at this majestic landscape, we discover that we are not alone. Others are gazing too. This tall mountain, the temple of God, is the focus of the world's attention. Pilgrims from all nations, a mosaic of backgrounds, surround us. People from every tribe, nation, and tongue are being drawn to the summit. We ask our guide, “Who are these people, and where are they going?” Isaiah informs us that they are headed to the summit. He says that Zion is a place of pilgrimage, and people from all parts of the earth stream towards its peak. Their souls long for this mountain like a deer thirsts for water. These individuals want what this mountain represents and what it has to offer the world--unity, harmony, and peace. He's right. There is something deeply irresistible motivating everyone hiking up this hill. They are all marching in the same direction. They are all seeking the same goal.

Just then, we hear the sound of music. These pilgrims are singing a joyful chorus as they walk. “We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion; we're marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God.” Interested in what this mountain has to offer us, we join in the singing and begin our ascent. As we climb, Isaiah points out the markers along the way. Each one directs our path. Here’s one,” he says, “this one was written by a musician. It’s a Psalm. The sign reads: “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear[. . .] Be still and know that I am God.” “Here is another,” says Isaiah, “This one was written by one of my co-workers. He’s a prophet named Ezekiel, “I will make a covenant of peace with them[. . .] I will establish them, increase their numbers, and place my sanctuary among them forever.” After a few steps, Isaiah begins to blush. He says, “This next one was written by me.” “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Reaching the summit, we realize that the ground is different than the ground of the valley. This is holy ground. Isaiah pauses. His eyes closed as if remembering something. Not meaning to interrupt, we ask, “Have you been here before?” “Yes,” he smiles, “Once before. I once saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. And I remember that all I could say was, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

This mountain's summit is much different than any peak we have visited before. We look to our left, overhearing a group of people talking about life, religion, politics,

and the world. Incredibly, these religious people are not at each other's throats. They are having something that Isaiah calls a “discussion.” “What's that?” we say. “We have never heard of that in our world.” Before he is able to answer, we hear the ping of a hammer hitting metal nearby. Looking to our right, we see that there is there is a long line of people waiting patiently, each one with a sword or spear in his or her hand. “What are they doing?” we ask Isaiah. “Why are so many people standing in this line? It seems to stretch for eternity.” He laughs, “Oh they don't need those weapons anymore. Up here, they're useless. Thankfully, we have a team of the finest blacksmiths, silversmiths, and tinsmiths in the world. Their names are Faith, Hope, and Love. They can work with anything. Up here, even the sharpest, most jagged object can be transformed into something useful. We pick one of these spears up. “It's heavy.” “Oh, yes, our guide says. That is a popular model. It is particularly deadly. It's called anger. Here, try to pick this one up. It's a lot heavier than it looks. Yes, that one. The well-worn, inflated one on the end. That one is called pride. There are too many of these weapons in our world. You know, I once brought someone up here, a friend of mine name Noel Erskine. This is what he had to say, on the mountain of the Lord “inequities will be balanced, shackles will be loosed, wrongs will be set right[, and out] of this justice will come transformation—weapons of violence will be turned into instruments for nourishment. The nations will put their swords down, and will not train for war anymore.”

Our guide, Isaiah, is able to see beyond judgment and beyond war. He has the audacity to say that this vision will occur in the course of human history. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., the prophet Isaiah speaks of a world that does not yet exist, but he says

it can. He speaks **a world** of peace and justice into being. Isaiah envisions a time when wars cease and soldiers come home, where swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. He describes a world where even the instruments of war become instruments of peace. He is able to see a reality of peace on earth.

*Our World: A. STRIVING FOR PEACE IN A HOSTILE WORLD*

**EXAMPLE**

I wonder what Isaiah would say if he looked at our world today. I imagine he would be disappointed. He might say as he does in Isaiah 59, “They are unfamiliar with peace; their deeds are unjust.” Think about the news of this past week: fighting in Afghanistan, fear of terrorism at a Christmas tree lighting in Oregon, a stalled peace treaty, the bombing of an island along the Korean border, and the discovery of a North Korean plant capable of making nuclear weapons. It is easy to become disillusioned and disappointed with the world today because it is so far from Isaiah’s vision of what the world should look like.

*Our World: B. THE POSSIBILITY OF PEACE*

Realistically, I have to ask myself if the vision that Isaiah presents is practical, or if it is just a lofty ideal. Can a peace like the one Isaiah describes last in this world? I believe it can, and let me tell you why. Because on a cold winter’s night, a multitude of angels began singing to a group of lowly shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among [men]!” For the past few weeks, I have been trying to think of a biblical symbol of this peace. I feel that it would be helpful for us if there is an image of what this peace looks like. Is there something in the Bible beaten from an

instrument of war to an instrument of peace? What comes most clearly to my mind, what stirs my soul, is the sound of nail being beaten into a cross--an instrument of torture becoming a means of redemption. Here is the way Isaiah puts it: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” I believe that a peace like the one Isaiah describes can exist in our world today. I believe that swords can be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks because a ghastly Roman execution technique became the glorious vehicle of salvation.

#### EXAMPLE

So where does that leave us? Global peace is certainly the long-term goal of Isaiah’s vision, right? Yes. It is a vision of peace ending with nations, but starting with us. Peace in *our* world starts with peace in *your* world. It starts with you. God offers us the chance to participate in making the world a better place. He has already initiated the process by offering us peace with himself. A pastor and author, Stacy Simpson Duke says, “In the end, what Isaiah offers is not only a vision of global transformation, but an invitation to live toward that day.”

It is easy for us to think, “That’s right. I believe in peace. I want it in my life. I could really use it in my family right now. Wow! What a Thanksgiving. Do we really have to this again at Christmas?” When you think about you next family reunion do you tense up? Are you preparing to man the battle stations? Sometimes we think, “It sure would be nice if the person who offended me would just apologize. I would love to forgive them. They just need to admit they were wrong.” How do you react when you think about the person who last offended you, the person who cut you off on the way to

the store, or the person who stole your idea at work? Is it anger? Malice? Hatred? Or could it be avoidance?

Maybe you need to be the one whose hand stretches out first. This Advent, you might need to forgive or offer forgiveness to a friend, a relative, colleague, or a neighbor. Maybe you need to blaze the way to the mountain Isaiah describes. I hope you hear the mountain’s invitation to you. I hope you hear the chorus of the pilgrims marching along side you. The question is: What spears and swords do you grip tightly in your heart? Maybe you need to let them go, or better yet, maybe you need to transform them into plowshares and pruning hooks. Amen.

**Invitation:**

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.

**Benediction:**

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you *peace*.

**SEASONAL Benediction:**

Just as the Angels Announced: “Peace on Earth, Good will toward men.”

“Peace On Earth”

11/29/10, ISA 2:1-5.

FUMC Murfreesboro; 8:30, 11:00 Traditional

<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/news.php?viewStory=1506>

Lyrics of the first verse: “Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home! A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there, Which, seek thro' the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere. Home! home! sweet, sweet home! There's no place like home. “When volunteer regiments and brigades were formed, in many instances, a band was included. Band recruiting was so successful that, by the end of 1861, the Union had 618 bands and more than 28,000 musicians.” [http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org/places/stones\\_river](http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org/places/stones_river). “Nighttime concerts were a way of breaking the tension while subtly reminding soldiers of their commitment.”

<http://www.prairieghosts.com/stonervr.html>. The rest of the quote: As one historian has said, that night here in Murfreesboro “the war was forgotten and the soldiers shared their mutual longings for [ . . . ] home.”

James, McIvor, *God Rest Ye Merry Soldiers* (New York: Viking, 2005), 1-2.

John Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Hendrekson: Peabody, Ma., 2001), 42. The surrounding areas above Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives and most of Northern Israel is higher in elevation than Jerusalem.

Noel Leo Erskine, *Feasting on the Word*, 4.

<http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh733.sht>

Psalm 46:9-10a.

Ezekiel 37:26.

Isaiah 9:6, KJV.

Isa 6.

Noel Leo Erskine, *Feasting on the Word*, 4.

John Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Hendrekson: Peabody, Ma., 2001), 42. “In the last days is literally “at the close of the days.” While the phrase always refers to a special moment when Yahweh’s promises come true, it does not have to refer to the end. When the “day: are depends on the context. The term generally denotes a period that is one step removed from the speaker and audience.”

Lk 2:13–14, NRSV.

Isa 53:5, NIV.

Stacy Simpson Duke, *Feasting on the Word*, 6.