

Writing the Story of Peace

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

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Texts:

Isaiah 2:1-5

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Prayer

Sermon

Pedro Reyes doesn't exactly turn swords into ploughshares. He turns guns into shovels.

Reyes, a Mexican artist, has repurposed tens of thousands of guns into musical instruments, sculpture, and tools. With 6700 guns he created musical instruments.<sup>1</sup>  
With 1527 guns he created 1527 shovels which were used to plant 1527 trees.<sup>2</sup>

His aim is "to show "how an agent of death can become an agent of life."<sup>3</sup>

In a world of violence, his art envisions a story of peace.

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In the days to come,  
the prophet declares,  
in the days to come,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2020/09/28/artist-pedro-reyes-and-the-sublimation-of-violence>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pocho.com/chilango-artist-melts-1527-guns-makes-shovels-to-plant-trees>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;

Their guns into guitars, their glocks into shovels,

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

No parent will teach violence, their ways will be turned to peace.

In the days to come,

Children will not have lockdown drills,

In the days to come LGBT folks will dance without fear,

In the days to come, people of color will go grocery shopping with nothing to worry  
about except how many eggs to buy.

In the days to come, no one will teach hatred.

(You know you could put an amen in here any time.)

In the days to come.

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In the days to come.

Not right now, of course.

Right now, well. Violence is just normal. We're so inured to war and guns and violence  
that they seem inevitable.

But the prophet Isaiah pushes back on that inevitability doesn't he?

If you've been Christmas shopping recently you've heard John Lennon and Yoko Ono's  
"Happy Xmas" on the Muzak speakers:

A very Merry Christmas  
And a happy New Year

Let's hope it's a good one  
Without any fear...

Juxtaposed with this provocation:

War is over, if you want it  
War is over now

War is over, if you want it...that was the refrain in my mind as I pondered Isaiah's words this week.

We have a choice in what to believe about the future, and we have a choice about our commitments.

You might remember the framework of Buddhists' Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone in their book *Active Hope*. They're writing about climate change but I think their framework applies more broadly. They talk about the power of vision, and the power of the story we tell of the present and future.

They describe three great stories that people tell:

The first is Business as Usual. Everything's fine and there's no reason to change the way we live. Pay no attention to anyone's problems.

The second story is the Great Unraveling. It's the story of inevitable catastrophe. That's just the way things are.

But Macy suggests that a third and radically different story should be our story. "The third story is held and embodied by those who know the first story is leading us to catastrophe and who refuse to let the second story have the last word. Involving the emergence of new and creative human responses...a life-sustaining society committed to the healing and recovery of our world. We call this story the Great Turning. The central plot is finding and offering our gift of active hope."<sup>4</sup> And she goes on to say that it really and truly matters which story we live into, which story our lives express. To have the future we yearn for, we need to live into that story as we write it. This is Gandhi's commission: "be the change you wish to see in the world."

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<sup>4</sup> *Active Hope*, p. 5

Our world has problems and we can just throw up our hands in defeat, or we can turn guns into shovels and plant more trees.

Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin are Christian leaders doing this work in the US - convinced after Sandy Hook that they had to. Claiborne says:

“The dominant culture often tells us that we can’t escape the violence, so we should therefore join the violence. Instead, this counter-story of turning swords into plows insists that violence is the problem, not the solution...Faith refuses to accept the world as it is and insists on moving the world toward what it should be....The prophecy ends with the vision of a world free of violence, but it begins with us.”<sup>5</sup>

War is over, if you want it...

In the days to come...

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Long ago, a young woman was asked to do something extraordinary, to be Theotokos: God-bearer.<sup>6</sup> Like Hannah, she would be the mother of a holy child. She was told, like Jeremiah before her, not to be afraid. Like Moses, she heard good news: you are not alone. Like Jeremiah, her youth was not an obstacle for God’s calling. Like Samuel and Moses and Jeremiah she had questions, how can this be, and she asked and she came to understand that nothing is impossible with God. Like Samuel and Isaiah before her, she said YES: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

The Prophet Mary told a story of peace and justice and liberation. She told the story of the Great Turning.

The Prophet Mary lived in a world in pain, a world inured to violence, oppression, occupation.

But she told the story of what would happen *in the days to come*. *And committed her life to living out that story:*

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<sup>5</sup> *Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence*, Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin, Kindle Edition

<sup>6</sup> Among others, Martin Luther used this term to describe Mary.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
God has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
God has helped God's servant Israel,  
in remembrance of God's mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

The Prophet Mary told the story of peace, coming into the world, soon and very soon.

She rose up and proclaimed the Good News that she was ready to be part of.

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer...called the Magnificat 'the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung' "<sup>7</sup>

The Prophet Mary was called, with her very body, to write the story of Good News of Great Joy - to bear God into the world for the salvation of the world. We may not be called to give birth to Jesus but we are called to rise up and proclaim God's love and justice into the world for the salvation of the world - to write the story of Peace. Even when the world is broken. Especially when the world is broken. We have a powerful story to write and to tell.

Advent is the time when we tell and re-tell our most sacred story:

One is coming

(who is also already God with us)

Who will save us -

Who calls us to be part of the salvation of the world

One is coming

Who is the prince of peace

Who leads us in the ways of peace

One is coming

(One is here, right now)

Whose kingdom is of peace and justice.

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Advent is the time when we say, in the days to come,

And then we put those days in our calendar, and we start planning, preparing and building.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/12/20/marys-magnificat-bible-is-revolutionary-so-evangelicals-silence-it/>

We proclaim as Isaiah did, that the day is surely coming.

We rise like Mary did, to speak against the powers and the principalities,  
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

One sword, turned into one ploughshare.

One gun turned into one shovel.

Three candles lit, and by the tender mercies of our God, the dawn shall break forth from  
on high.<sup>8</sup>

Let's not just tell the story of peace. Let's live it.

Come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:78