

DESIRE OF EVERY NATION
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First Sunday in Advent
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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The church year begins with hope. Listen to these lessons appointed for the first Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Nations shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and they shall study war no more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

To which we might add:

O house of Jefferson, Hamilton and Adams, come. Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD who works for peace not by killing those who stand in the way as world empires do and have done; but rather by loving enemies, feeding the hungry and healing the sick.

To which the gospel lesson adds a cautionary note.

Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. So keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Be ready, for the Son of Man [the child of humanity] is coming at an unexpected hour."

Which I take to mean, humanity has yet to fully evolve. In other words, there's more to come. You can't predict it. It's not inevitable. Choices must be made and one choice has to do with the candle we lit this morning—the candle of hope.

Speaking of hope, the Psalm for today (Psalm 122), invites us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. And that, in case you didn't know, is a 3,000 year-old prayer request. And when it comes to Jerusalem that prayer is always timely.

Palestinians in the Occupied Territory would agree as long as we pray for real peace not some cheap imitation. Peace is not tranquility. Peace without justice is no peace. Peace is a whole lot more than the absence of war. But stopping wars is a good place to start.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers. (Psalm 122)

Peace within your walls. Security within your towers.

Towers?

Where was that prayer before 9/11? Would such prayers have spared our twin towers? Perhaps. Those twin towers and the people in them might have been spared had our nation's prayers long ago been Advent prayers, prayers that invite listening to voices crying in the wilderness.

Advent prayers wake us up, wake us up to nations in distress, to nations and peoples crying out for peace, for justice, for healing, safety, and freedom.

O come, Desire of every nation, come.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Instead of me talking anymore about prayer, let us pause now to offer prayers for Jerusalem and other troubled places.

Let us pray for Jerusalem. Pray that the Iranians don't make a nuclear bomb and hurl it at Israel. Pray that Israelis may be free of fear!

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

Let us pray for Tehran. Pray that the Israelis don't hurl the nukes they already have at Iran. Pray that Iranians may be free of fear.

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

Let us pray for Baghdad. Pray that Iraqis will stop killing each other and establish a government that respects civil and human rights. Pray that Iraqis may be free of fear.

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

Let us pray for Cairo and Damascus. Let us pray for Beirut, Kabul and Mogadishu. Pray that Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, Afghans and Somalis will stop killing each other and establish a government that respects civil and human rights.

Pray for Riyadh. Pray that Saudis will stop suppressing women and establish a government that respects civil and human rights

Let us pray for Bogota. Pray that Colombian drug lords will stop killing and maiming.

Pray that those lands and peoples may be free of fear.

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

And let us pray for Washington. Pray that Americans will stop bickering and start treating the poor, the sick, the homeless, the immigrant, and marginalized kindly and justly. Pray that America will treat the earth, its rivers, mountains, soil and air kindly and justly. Pray that America will restore economic equality and parity. Pray that America will repent of its greed and profiteering from selling weapons of mass destruction here and abroad.

Pray for peace in our schools, in our prisons, in the criminal justice system, between races and religions, between capital and labor, between Democrats and Republicans. Pray for the peace of Washington and all places that make laws that govern lands and peoples. Pray that we may be free of fear and inspired by hope.

Lord, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

Amen. And may it be so.

In this Advent season, please keep praying for peace. Pray but don't hold your breath because peace, justice and freedom will not arrive while we hold our

breath waiting for Messiah to save us. You can't get up and pray for peace and then go back to sleep waiting for Santa to put peace, a cure for cancer and a Sony Play Station under your tree. If we're looking for a body to descend from the clouds or ride in on a white horse we will miss a thousand other appearances of Christ today and tomorrow and the day after that.

The Messiah stands before us in a thousand different faces with a thousand different names and says in so many words or less: *today is the day of salvation. Today your humanity can shine forth.*

Wake up. Notice. Pay attention. Light a candle against the darkness.

In some ways the world is now plagued with more violence and greed than ever before. It is not for us to know the time or the outcome. It is for us to be faithful, to be faithful to the call of love.

Optimism and hope are not the same. Today we light the candle of hope not the candle of optimism.

As Jesus put it, no one knows the day or hour when all will be one and done. What we can know is that in every day and in every hour there are invitations—opportunities to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

It's not a matter of getting busy or getting all worked up. It's a matter of being still, still enough to listen to the invitations arising from the broken and frightened world you live in, including your own broken and troubled heart.

Listen. Notice. Pay attention.

One of the illusions of life is that the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. (Ralph Waldo Emerson.)