

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Can You Imagine?”**

Isaiah 2: 1 – 5

First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2014

“The day is coming when men, women, and children from around the world will flock to places like this church to learn about God and to be instructed in His ways... because they will be consumed by the desire to serve God well. The day is coming when injustice, and immorality, and evil will be as extinct as the Brontosaurus! Greediness will disappear! The needy will always be looked after! The hungry will be fed! The homeless will be sheltered! No one will ever fall through the cracks again!

“The day is coming when violence, and warfare, and bloodshed will cease! Traditional enemies will become trusted friends! Centuries old disputes will finally be settled, once and for all! The weapons of war will be replaced by the technology of peace! The day is coming when the whole world really will become a kinder... gentler... and godlier place for everyone!”

Wow! Talk about your big campaign promises! Talk about your “all things to all people” political agendas! This vision of the world to come which was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah makes even the most extravagant assurances of the typical presidential candidate sound like the proverbial hill of beans!

I mean, it sounds too good to be true, but there it is anyway: a vision of a world in which nice guys *do* finish first... a world in which bad things *don't* happen to good people... a world in which the economy *doesn't* fall apart, in which terrorists *don't* blow things up, in which armies *aren't* needed to keep us all safe and free from tyranny. Isaiah paints a picture of a world without poverty... a world without homelessness... a world without unrelieved hunger... a world without debate and disagreement Isaiah over issues of theology, because everyone will be instructed by the mouth of God Himself.

Can you imagine what a world like that would be like? Can you imagine a world in which the mail always arrived on time... where there was never a missing part in a box which stated “some assembly required?” Can you imagine a world with no school bullies... where no one made fun of you because of the way you look, or talk, or dress? Can you imagine a world in which marriages never ended... in which businesses never failed... in which bodies never became ravaged by disease... in which people never died? Can you imagine it? It's not easy... but a text like Isaiah chapter two invites us imagine just such a world. Because that's the world that we're promised will come... some day. ***Some day...***

Ah, but that's the catch, isn't it? That part about “some day.” We can only imagine this prosperous, glorious, world of Isaiah... because *some* day isn't *to-day*! Oh sure, we sometimes catch brief glimpses of Isaiah's promised world; sometimes the grace

of God's presence, and power, and peace touches us, and blesses us, and lifts us above the frustrations of daily life. And we're grateful for all those times when we're reminded that God is always with us... no matter what.

But the harsh reality of our world is that things sometimes *don't* work out the way we want. Sometimes, when peace makes a comeback in one part of the world, allowing old enemies to become friends once again... new wars break out someplace else, creating fresh divisions and sowing the seeds of hatred that will grow unchecked for generations. Sometimes, just when we think we've got our fingers in all the leaking holes of our life... some new crack springs a leak, and then we're running for cover so we don't get soaked!

Make no mistake... we rejoice a lot now, no doubt about it. But we still sometimes cry and grieve. We usually manage to get by all right... but we still find ourselves lacking at times, in one way or another. We usually conduct ourselves with ethics, and integrity, and justice... but in the privacy of our own hearts and souls, we suffer the pain and guilt of our own personal evil.

So, no, we don't yet live completely in Isaiah's world of justice and peace and promise. And neither did the people to whom his prophetic message was delivered, so many years ago. For them, as for us, Isaiah's vision was of a world which is not yet... but which will be, *some day!* And it's that *some day* which is the focus of our worship and our prayer and our preparation during this season of Advent.

Because that vision of justice and peace and hope proclaimed by Isaiah isn't some cruel joke, played on humanity by an uncaring God. No, it's the *promise* of God that this world, even with all its defects and malfunctions, still matters greatly to Him! It's the promise of God that we, you and me, with all our problems and shortcomings and needs... *still matter greatly to Him!* It's the promise of Almighty God that some day, whether in this world or the next, we will find what we truly need... we will realize our heart's desire... that God's great plan for Creation *will come to pass!*

This is the great promise of the Lord's Table... not just a reminder that Jesus once "was," but that He still "is" and that He will one day come again to bring about that great and glorious world to which Isaiah pointed! The great promise of Advent and Christmas is that God is not yet finished with us, or with our world! There is more yet to come, there's another chapter yet to be written, the dangers and difficulties that dominate so many of our headline is *not* the end of the story!

God has a plan and a purpose for His creation that will become a reality... and we have His promise on that, a promise that no power on earth will ever be able to break. In the meantime, we work with all our strength to realize as much of Isaiah's hopeful vision as we can... but we know that even when our best efforts fall short, God will still bring that vision to pass, some day!

A popular saying which arose out of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's was the phrase, "*How long? Not long!*" It was a saying of hope and encouragement, shared between African American people urging patience and perseverance in the face of sometimes horrible mistreatment and injustice.

It was a reminder that, even though the current situation was often very grim, justice was coming... righteousness was on the horizon... soon a new day of peace and

equality would dawn for them and for their children. And they were able to bear the most awful discrimination, and to continue to work for positive change, by keeping before their eyes the hope that some day that new day would come... some day.

As we enter into another Advent season this morning, we find ourselves asking the very same question: *“How long, Lord? How long?”* And the answer comes back to us: *“Not long! For lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age! You are always in my loving arms... and I will bring about the plans I have for you, and for the rest of my creation!”*

Can you imagine it? Hey, it's no dream... it's the promise of Almighty God! That great and glorious day is coming!

Let's count on it; let's hope for it; and let's live our lives in the light of it! In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!