

Title: *Ain't gonna study war no more*

Isaiah 2:2-5

Leader: 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,

All: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that we may be instructed in God's ways and walk in God's paths."

Leader: For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

All: O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only God. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Humanity. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Humanity. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Humanity is coming at an unexpected hour.

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

Come, let us live in these ways, NOW.

Come, let us act in ways today, that help bring this vision into a reality

This is what Isaiah means when he says, “Come, let us walk in the light.” Come, let us walk this talk; let us, one step at a time, live in ways that will turn this vision into a reality. Come, let us live as if this were true. Come, let us share the vision of what we see – of how it could – of how it will be. Come, let us walk in the light.

Come, let us, step-by-step, be people who help manifest this reality in the world.

Come, let us walk in the light.

Walter Brueggemann, professor of Old Testament at Columbia University, has essentially built his life’s work around the word “imagination.” The God revealed in the Bible, says Brueggemann, is revealed and filtered through human imagination. I have come to think, he continues, that all of our traditions and Denominations are just human filters of imagination. So that in all of our church traditions and denominations, we are busy imagining God: who is God, what is God like, and who are we in light of that imagination.

Part of what we do each Sunday when we come together, is to try and shape one another’s imagination of God, of who God is and who we are in light of that – trying to talk about the realities on this side (one side) of the door, and imagine how God wishes for it to be on the other side of the door – the threshold of imagination. So then, to risk taking our door

metaphor¹ one step too far, we might then say that the act of worship/gathering/doing church, is **the threshold of imagination.** We literally come in from the world, from a week of living in a particular reality shaped by the common American imagination. We walk through the doorway of the church where we consider a different reality, a reality shaped by God's ways and God's vision, what Jesus called "the kingdom of God." We sing about a different way of seeing beauty and of dreaming of the future; we read about a different sense of what is valuable; we consider a different calculator of what is a good usage of financial resources; we pray for things to be, not as they are, but how they could be; we consider a different sense of time – not one that is marked by the turning of calendars or election cycles, but the fullness of God's time – a long arc of time bending toward justice.

And then, after this time of shaping our imagination around the kingdom of God, we go back out of the door. And so, our time together is a threshold of imagination. A forming of our imagination of God. We come through the threshold, in part, to adjust our filter – to see in a different light, by the light of Christ.

The core of the Old Testament imagination is at Mt. Sinai, where a group of freed slaves imaged God – this God was a tough God concerned with holiness and order: at the burning bush, God said, "take off your shoes in my presence." At the mountain there was smoke and fire and

¹ During the "Children's Time" for Advent we are using a door, set upfront in the sanctuary. Each week we talk about some realities of life on one side of the door, then walk through the door, and imagine those realities in what God would want. I brought this door idea into the sermon here.

trumpets, and when God spoke, God said, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt – now, thou shalt not!”²

This is because this God is being imagined and processed in the presence of Pharaoh, and these slaves needed a God who could out muscle Pharaoh – a God who was uncompromising – a God strong and powerful, even more powerful than one who was in their day, “The most powerful man in the free world.” This God was seen and celebrated as a warrior God, the “Lord of hosts” (which means, the God of armies). This God offered a hard-nosed relationship, “I command and you obey. If you do, you will prosper. If you disobey, you will suffer.”

This vision was maintained and remembered as a people who formed a city-state, feeling cycle after cycle of outsider attack, of outside aggression and new world powers seeking to invade their borders. This image of a warrior God continued as they sought to secure their borders and keep at bay those who worshipped other gods – this strong and powerful God to fight with them was still important to how the imagined God to be.

But now, centuries later, their life has changed. They have seen freedom. They have seen kingdoms rise and fall. They have seen cycles of violence upon violence upon violence. And now, the prophet Isaiah whose world has been shaped by this tradition, begins to get a new vision of God – a new vision of who God is, of the future that God wants. Isaiah begins to imagine God through a different lens. This new image is also formed at a Mountain, but not Mt. Sinai, a new mountain – Mt. Zion, the mountain of the Lord. Isaiah offers a new filter for the people to see God with, a new reality to live into, step-by-step, as they wait for a Messiah. No

² Walter Brueggemann offers this view of the Old Testament in a speech entitled, “Imagining Life from God and Back to God” given at Abilene Christian University.

longer of Lord of armies, but a Lord of who instructs in the ways of peace and human flourishing.

This passage of scripture from Isaiah has shaped and tingled the human imagination from the day Isaiah first articulated until today. The Old Testament world, like ours, often feels dominated by stories of violence, and into that reality these words of Isaiah (and also in Micah) disrupt and they intrigue us – they inspire us to think beyond what we see. These words have inspired and reformed the imagination of many:



1. The city of [Culiacán](#), In western Mexico, the city of Culiacan has the highest rate of gun deaths in the country. There, artist Pedro Reyes started a campaign for residents to turn their guns over to him in exchange for a coupon that they could use to buy electronics or household appliances. He collected **1,527 guns** — he melted them down and transformed them into 1,527 shovel heads that are now being used to plant trees throughout the community.

**Come, let us walk in the light*



2. London's [Olympic Stadium](#),

In London, they used a unique Green building strategy on their Olympic stadium. They melted down metals from knives and guns that had been taken by the metropolitan police and used this metal in the building of this world-class stadium.

**Come, let us walk in the light.*



3. Mozambique

Since 1995, [The Christian Council of Mozambique](#) has managed a program that exchanges tools (such as bicycles, sewing machines and hoes) for weapons — relics of the country's former 16 year civil war. The weapons are then given to Mozambican artists which have been turned into furniture and other works of art.

**Come, let us walk in the light.*



4. **In the village of Bilin**, in the West Bank of Palestine, a woman has planted a peculiar garden – each plant and flower is grown in a spent tear gas grenade, collected from the area – tear gas used in the years of clashing between Israeli and Palestinian soldiers. Her desert garden is situated in an area of disputed land, claimed by both Israel and Palestine. Her garden is a living example of Isaiah's words.

**Come, let us walk in the light.*

Advent is the season of waiting – waiting for the Messiah – waiting for God’s new way to be unleashed into the world. It is hard to wait, to hold out hope for such a day, for this distant vision that will come at an unspecified time. Hard to hope for such a Messiah’s reign to come fully to us here on earth. But we must – ***we must keep this hope alive in every generation.*** This is the only way such a vision can become a reality, as some of us continue to believe in this hope, some of us continue to live out this hope, this vision – until the day comes.

In 250 years of American slavery, it was only the final generation that saw freedom. But for those 249, those enslaved kept hope alive. They told stories of their homeland. They sang songs of subversion as they worked, songs of hope; they read from the Exodus though it was forbidden; they preached of God’s liberation; they created an underground railroad to freedom. They kept hope alive until, step-by-step, that hope became a reality.

Come, let us walk in the light.

Nelson Mandela sat in prison for 27 years as a political prisoner, 10,000 nights of waiting for the end of apartheid in a prison cell. He says that it was in that cell that he was shaped and formed by God in a new way, a way that would be needed once he was freed” “It was during those long and hungry years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of *all* people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. When I walked out of prison, I knew my mission to liberate the oppressor and the oppressed.”

Come, let us walk in the light.

We are shaped by what it is we are waiting for – by what we imagine to be on the other side of our waiting – what we imagine to lie on the other side of the door. What Messiah are we waiting for? What God are you waiting for?

Our waiting is not nothing. It is something – a very big something – because we tend to be shaped by whatever it is we are waiting for.³ When we want something really badly, our whole life can rearrange around that goal. A baby; a house; a new job/career; independence (as a teenager); waiting for a calling – a clear sense of what to do with my life; waiting for a partner to share life with; waiting to be a parent. What we imagine to be on the other end of our waiting, this shapes us, it forms us. And we, of course shape it – this unknown thing which we do not fully know, we are shaping it through our active waiting, through our preparation.

What God do you imagine that you are waiting on? What image of God is shaping you and your waiting this Advent season?

The God of ALL creation: American and Syrian, Christian and Muslim; sea and river and tree and flower.

The God who planted the spark of the Divine in ALL people.

The God who longs to teach us the ways of peace.

The God of transformation.

The God who came, is present, and will continue to come.

³ Barbara Brown Taylor offers this view of active waiting in her sermon “Waiting in the Dark.”

What vision has God given you – what vision is God giving you. Not a vision dropped from the heavens, but a vision shaped and formed over time. A vision given for you and for this time.

Martin Luther King's 'I have a Dream' speech is probably the best model of contemporary prophetic imagination that we have. That was a vision from God, but it wasn't a vision that came to him in one glimpse as he looked at the sky, or one single evening as he slept. That dream came over a life time, it was the work of a life time, of being who he was, and being who he was in the time he lived – it was a vision from God given and shaped and crafted over a lifetime. He spent a lifetime getting that speech; it was mediated through 250 years of slavery, and another 100 years of segregation and Jim Crow.

And that is how it is among us. God shapes our imaginations over our lifetimes. God gives us visions for our time and our place. And so, I ask again, what vision is God giving you? What vision are you to help bring into reality, step-by-step?

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord; that we may be instructed in God's ways and walk in God's paths...



1. They shall turn their warheads into wind turbines, and their attack drones into solar arrays.



2. Their tanks will become playgrounds, and their tear gas canisters planters.



3. They shall turn their machine guns into furniture, and their weapons into works of art.



4. They shall beat their body armor into bicycles, and their Camouflage into comforters.



Come, let us walk in the light.

Come, let us live in these ways, now!

Come, let us act today in ways which bring this vision to reality.

Come, let us walk in the light.