

Advent 1A (11/27/16)

**Isaiah 2:1-5**

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

*If the first Sunday of Advent is the dawn of a new church year, then our first reading from Isaiah is the dream in which we find ourselves as we awaken. It's God's dream for us, and so it speaks to our deepest hopes. Even the best dreams can slip away amid the circumstances of life as we know it. But unlike fleeting dreams, God's dream is refreshed in our memory by signs of its ultimate fulfillment, not the least of which is the promised arrival of an extraordinary child. On the first Sunday of Advent, God awakens us to God's dream again so that we might "walk in the light of the LORD" until it is realized.*

Have you ever had the experience of awakening to a new day in the middle of a dream? Sometimes it takes a moment before you can tell the difference between the world of the dream and the world around you. And, although dreams tend to slip away quickly, sometimes a dream is so vivid that it remains with you throughout the day and even beyond. **If the first Sunday in Advent is the dawn of a new church year, then our first reading from Isaiah is the dream in which we all find ourselves as we awaken.**

Isaiah's vision is the very first message we hear as we are gathered this year, and its details are as memorable as any dream's:

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 plowshares,  
 and their spears into pruning hooks;  
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
 neither shall they learn war any more.  
 O house of Jacob,  
 come, let us walk  
 in the light of the LORD!

The prophet Isaiah dreams of a future in which God's dwelling place, God's temple, rises above even the highest mountain. Multitudes from every nation are drawn to it, scaling the mountain together to reach communion with God. In God's presence, all our divisions dissolve into a "shared openness"<sup>1</sup> to God's wisdom, God's ways. And God truly reigns among us, mediating conflicts justly and peaceably. Trusting God as our guide, the peoples of the world are no longer captive to violence and warfare, so we convert our weapons for taking life into tools for sustaining life<sup>2</sup> – swords and spears, machine guns and missiles are dismantled and rebuilt into ploughs and pruning hooks, tractors and combines. And, providing for the well-being of all people, we make a lasting peace.

What a way to awaken to a new church year! As we open our eyes to the season of Advent, we cling to Isaiah's dream. **It's God's dream for us, so it speaks to our deepest hopes – peace on earth and goodwill for all.**<sup>3</sup> But even the best dreams can slip away amid the circumstances of life as we know it. It's hard to

---

<sup>1</sup> Stacey Simpson Duke, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol.1, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Simpson Duke, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol.1, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Stacey Simpson Duke, 4.

imagine how God's dream could ever be realized in a world of political polarization, arms proliferation, and widespread suffering. According to the headlines, it would appear that we are permanently divided, and incapable of coming together around shared priorities. It may seem that Isaiah's vision is, in fact, a nonstarter, a pipe dream.

**So, instead of living into God's dream for us, we lose ourselves in the fantasy of alternative dreams** – dreams of academic or professional success, material wealth, the ideal family, the right social life – and we project those dreams onto our Facebook pages and Christmas cards. When we don't believe there's enough to go around, we focus our attention on whatever piece of the pie we desire for ourselves. Yet, even these dreams tend to slip away, and we are disappointed by the brokenness of our own lives.

**But unlike fleeting dreams, God's dream lingers in our collective consciousness. It's refreshed in our memory by signs of its ultimate fulfillment, not the least of which is the promised arrival of an extraordinary child.** Just a few chapters following our first reading today, the prophet Isaiah elaborates on his hope-filled vision for the future, writing words that are also familiar to us at this time of year:

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
 He will establish and uphold it  
 with justice and with righteousness  
 from this time onward and forevermore.<sup>4</sup>

**This is the one for whom we wait this Advent. And, even as we anticipate the celebration of his birth, we also await the day of his definitive return. Under the guidance of this Wonderful Counselor, this Prince of Peace, God’s dream for the world will be fulfilled. In God’s time, we *shall* overcome; justice will carry the day and peace will take root.**

“But,” as our Gospel text from Matthew insists, “about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”<sup>5</sup> So, rather than idly look to a future moment that we cannot predict, or forsake God’s dream altogether amid signs of hopelessness, let’s move toward it, one step at a time. “Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!” Isaiah invites us. Strengthened by God’s word of hope and a meal for the road, let’s put one foot in front of the other. And deed of mercy by deed of mercy, work of justice by work of justice, let’s walk in the light of the Lord, knowing full well that we will stumble, and that God will pick us up again. At the dawn of a new church year, as God awakens us again to God’s dream, let’s look to the mountain peak in the distance and commit ourselves to our journey toward it today.

---

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 24:36.