

Sue Rakoczy IHM

Reflection

Monday December 4, 2023

Readings:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 8:5-11

Last week, when I first looked at the readings for today, I was amazed to see that today's first reading from Isaiah is so very appropriate for Advent in time of war. For that is our Advent context this year: War in Gaza, hostages held in captivity, bombings of hospitals and residences, unending war in Ukraine, in Sudan, in Syria. Violence pervades our world.

Yet Isaiah tells us to go up to "the mountain of the Lord" where we will learn "new ways" and walk in "new paths", where swords will become ploughshares and spears turn into sickles. Violence will recede and food will be grown.

But today in December 2023 this seems nearly impossible. We watch the news each evening and see ever more bloodshed and death. Young children hostages emerge from captivity. Why children? Why are they pawns?

Isaiah tells us not that God will do this but we will do the work of transforming instruments of war into food producing tools. People will no longer train for war; the arms races will be halted.

And it all seems impossible—because it is. War is business; hatred satisfies; power corrupts. This is the vision of a world drunk on violence since it seems to satisfy the deep needs of power and domination. And this is a male vision. Women are not leading their countries to war. Certainly, some are in the armies but it is men who have decided to wreak this violence.

On the mountain of the Lord, we will learn the way of non-violence. The Vow of Non-Violence developed by Pax Christi shows the way to a new way of living.

This means

By striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;

Refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence; by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;

By living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;

by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

Our everyday speech often contains violent images:

When push comes to shove

Right on target
Take a stab at it
To be brutally honest
Fight for your rights
Get away with murder
If looks could kill...and more

One Advent resolution could be to examine our speech and begin to use more words of peace and less of violence.

In the Gospel from Matthew Jesus is astonished by the faith of a Roman centurion—a commander in battle—who asks Jesus to heal his servant—which Jesus does. Faith outside the contours of what is expected—a pagan who courageously approached Jesus.

Perhaps we need to look for peacemakers outside the boundaries familiar to us. A Google search led me to a number of sites which showed Israeli and Palestinian women marching and acting for peace and an end to the violence. Certainly, there are more. But they will not be on the evening news.

The words of Isaiah are not an eschatological vision of the future but a call today to turn the violence of war into fields of peace and justice.