

Christmas Fit for a King

The King of Enduring Hope

November 27, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – The Year of the Lord’s Favor (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “*the year of the Lord’s favor*” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new possibilities with God this year and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² *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.*

³ *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.*

⁴ *He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

⁵ *O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!*

Commentary:

In this Advent season, we are invited to awaken from our expectations and consider life afresh in light of the new gifts God is about to give. The community of faith has been hoping for a very long time. The substance of that hope, deeply rooted in the Old Testament, is persistent and resilient. As both prophet and psalmist attest, Israel hopes for justice, peace, and well-being.

Our passage from Isaiah is a poem. This poem is a "word" which Isaiah "saw" (vs 1). That is, it is a vision, an act of imagination that looks beyond present dismay through the eyes of God, to see what will be that is not yet. That is the function of promise (and therefore Advent) in the life of faith. Under promise, in Advent, faith sees what will be that is not yet. The ground for such a daring act of hope is "it shall come to pass in the latter days" (vs 2). The formula makes two assertions. On the one hand, the promise is very sure, as sure as the intent of God. On the other hand, the poet does not know when. It is in the nature of faithful promise to trust the one who promises, and therefore not to need a timetable.

The promise proceeds by making a sharp contrast between what is and what will be. The city of Jerusalem, in the time of Isaiah, was a marginal and vulnerable operation. Jerusalem lived and flourished, or suffered, at the behest of the great powers.

Against that present shabbiness, the poet imagines a majestic future for the city. For a moment he entertains a scenario in which all the other nations, even the super powers of Assyria and Egypt, will "stream" to Jerusalem. In the moment of utterance, the repressed hopes of ideological Israel flashed to consciousness. This is the long-promised coming greatness of the city.

As quickly as that fantasy is suggested, however, just as quickly is it refuted and withdrawn. Focus on promise not only encourages self-serving anticipation, it also corrects and precludes such a false promise. The poem is not an anticipation of triumph for the Jerusalem political-religious establishment. Quite the contrary! It is the place of God's presence in the "house", that is, the Temple, that is important. God's presence lives in profound tension with the would-be success of human power; it is to God's

presence that all the nations shall stream. Thus the poet's vision is a profoundly theological vision that is fixed on God.

The poem ends with a lyrical vision of an alternative economy and the dismantling of the weapons of war (vs 4). The move to a "peacetime economy" requires not only good intentions, but procedures whereby the resources and capacities of the economy are otherwise deployed. It is not enough to end spears and swords as an act of romance or of goodwill. There must at the same time be production of instruments of life, such as plowshares and pruning hooks. Thus human energies and public resources are reassigned to vine-dressing and agriculture. The economy is transformed; the earth is also transformed, from battleground to fertile garden.

- Adapted from "Texts for Preaching, Year A"; W. Bruggerman, et al; p 1-3

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Advent is a time of hope. What are you hopeful for in this season?
2. The ancient Israelites were hopeful for a political king to conquer their enemies. Instead, God sent Jesus as their king. If such a thing were to happen in our world today (i.e.: the arrival of Jesus, not a military conqueror) how do think the world would respond? How would you respond?
3. In a world where we seem to constantly hear about random acts of violence on a daily basis, what would it look like to "beat [our] swords into ploughshares, and [our] spears into pruning-hooks"? In other words, what would it look like to totally disarm ourselves?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Isaiah 2:4
*He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*