

Isaiah 2:1-6 “Hope Sunday”

What a perfect scripture to begin our Advent Season! It's an especially powerful message for Hope Sunday! It's a reminder to God's people that God reigns on the throne of heaven and is coming to change everything. To have hope in this is powerful. It was a powerful message to the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon 2,500 years ago, and it continues to be a powerful message to God's people today. Isaiah says that the mountain of the Lord's house is going to be the highest mountain and that people from all over will stream to it and God's ways will be taught and passed on. It's going to be an exciting time where people are going to be drawn closer to God and experience the wonder of God's majesty through God's judgment. And let me tell you about “God's judgment” in this context. This isn't the kind of judgment that we typically associate with plagues, hellfire and brimstone. This is the kind of judgment where God rules in favor of the ones who have been wronged. This isn't “God's going to judge you because you've messed up,” this is, “God's judgment is near, and you'll finally get the justice you deserve. And the best thing is that God will settle all disputes, and that in the end, we are all going to voluntarily get rid of our weapons of war. Nations will no longer raise swords against each other and we will no longer learn how to make war. Or as the Upbeats sang last week, “We ain't even gonna *study* war no more.” We'll take our destructive weapons and forge them into useful farming tools.

Can you think of anything more hopeful than this? Especially for the people of Israel who had lived by the sword for so long, and were conquered and taken into captivity by the sword. War is so exhausting. It doesn't just take a toll as far as the human lives that are lost either. It takes its toll on the human psyche too. And yet here's Isaiah promising that there will be a time when wars will cease. Not because God is going to come down and smite the enemies of Israel. War will end because the very *desire* for war will be taken away.

Now ... can you imagine what might happen if we were to take our *counterproductive* tools ... our tools of war ... the tools that prevent us from living how God wants us to live ... and transform them into something that's actually *productive*? That sword that's designed to *take* another person's life? Wouldn't it be better if you could use it to make a farming tool that's actually used to *give* life to a community through food? What a beautiful illustration we have been given in this passage. It's a powerful illustration that reminds us of all that God can do through us if only we surrender what we *think* is the right way and allow God to lead us in what is *actually* the right way. Give up the things that are counterproductive and instead use them to create great things for our community so that our community can thrive and grow.

“Are you saying that we should surrender all our weapons and be defenseless as a nation?” No. But I am saying we can be the kind of people who wage peace rather than war. Jesus said that the reign of God is sneaky and subversive in the way that it spreads. It's like a mustard seed that takes over a field. It's like a little bit of yeast that causes a whole loaf of bread to rise. It doesn't come all at once with a big “boom” it comes over time and changes the landscape as it moves. See, I don't think we were born as warring people. “Oh yeah?” you may say ... “Try telling that to my toddler who turns every stick they find on the ground into a gun!” Yes. I have three boys, and they grew up in two different houses that had a *lot* of trees that produced a *lot* of sticks. I know exactly what you're talking about. But they weren't born knowing about guns or what they're used for. See, I think we learn how to wage war by *example*.

A few weeks ago, the movie *American History X* came out on Netflix. It's not a new movie. In fact, it was released 20 years ago, but it's one of those movies that is still relevant today and will be for quite some time. I haven't showed it at Faith in Films because if I did, it would go down on record as the most depressing and disturbing movie I've ever shown and nobody would come again. However, I think every high school student should see this film during their freshman year. The story

follows the life of two brothers, Derek and Danny Vineyard who grew up in Southern California. Their family life was challenging because their mom had late-stage lung cancer and their dad, who was a fire-fighter, was killed on duty by a gang member. Derek was outraged that his dad was killed while doing his job by a black man, so out of anger, Derek became heavily involved with a gang of white-supremacist skinheads led by a middle-age white man. In just a short period of time, he became a leader in this gang, and was sort of the right-hand person for the leader. A few years later, Derek wound up in prison after he killed two young black men for trying to break into his car. While he was in prison, his younger brother Danny became involved with the skinhead gang. He immediately had credibility in the gang because his brother was considered a hero among them. But while Derek was in prison, he befriended a black man and had a life-changing epiphany that caused him to turn his back on the skinheads. Once he was released from prison, Derek teamed up with his old high school principal to try to get his little brother Danny to break ties with the skinheads. As you watch this movie, you're led to believe that the reason why these two boys became skinheads had to do with their father's death at the hands of a black man. That life-changing event combined with the influence of the charismatic leader of the skinhead gang must be the reason why they became such hateful racists.

But one of the big revelations in the movie comes in a flashback scene where the boys are sitting at the dinner table with their family not long before their dad was killed. Derek was still in high school, and was sharing about what he had learned about the Civil Right Movement from during black history month. The dad immediately told Derek to not pay attention to what he was learning in school about the Civil Rights movement because it was all just "fake news" to try to bring down "hard-working white people." So the big revelation is that the boys' indoctrination into a white supremacist gang didn't happen overnight. It happened long before the gang ever got a hold of them. Throughout their lives the seeds of racism were subtly being planted in their minds so that by the time they were in high school ... by the time they were struggling

with the unresolved grief over their father, they were ripe for the picking.

Even though this is a fictional story, it's played out every day in our culture. A person doesn't

[[[[MARKER]]]] This really made me think about what am I teaching to my children ... what am I teaching to other people in my life in my sphere of influence ... what am I teaching? Am I teaching others to war? Or am I teaching them the way of peace and the way of God and the way to show that love and grace of God to others because we learn how to make war and what a day it will be when we stop learning that ... when we start learning that there are "teams." But there aren't "teams." We are all children of God on this same team. And when we can learn that and really internalize that and stop teaching the next generation to war against one another ... wow. That is where real transformation comes. I love how this ends: "Come, house of Jacob ... let us walk by the Lord's light." It is an invitation to us to walk in the Lord's light ... to walk this way now. We don't have to wait 'til the Lord to come back to fix these things. We can bring this kind of peace now if we only choose to walk by the Lord's light now. And so maybe that's what we can be thinking about during this advent season: "How can we walk in the Lord's light. How can we make a way for peace? How can we take those counter productive things in our lives and instead beat them into something productive that will bring our community wholeness in the fullness of God.