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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
November 28, 2010

Isaiah 2:1-5
"Seeking the Mountain Top"

The homily today is a First Sunday of Advent reflection from the Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) web page. It is a scripture text; an interpretation by the Reverend Canon Robert Edmunds, Chaplain to the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Canon Pastor of the Cathedral of St. George; a meditation and prayer. CMEP is a coalition of 24 public policy offices of national churches and agencies - Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. It is based in Washington DC.

Scripture

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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! – Isaiah 2:1-5

Interpretation

Whenever mountaintops are mentioned in the Bible, we do well to pay attention. The high places were often associated with important events, revelations and visions from God's very hand. Moses at Mt. Sinai, Jesus in prayer on various mountains and the Transfiguration all come to mind. In this passage the holy mountain of Jerusalem, referred to as Zion, is brought into sharp focus as God's dwelling place from which all the nations are invited to come and learn to walk in the light of the way of the Lord.

This vision is inspiring to all who work, pray and hope for peace, both here in Jerusalem and throughout the world. The power of all people coming in humility to learn of God's way of life to turn away from division, violence and war towards God's way of light provides a vision of hope for the future of all creation.

However, the historical record since Isaiah's vision suggests that war has indeed been learned and learned too well over many centuries. Blood has run through the streets of Jerusalem in times past and politically inspired violence continues in many of her neighborhoods even now. Despite Isaiah's vision; despite the tears Jesus shed as he overlooked the Holy City; despite centuries of prayers in the holy places by faithful people, Jerusalem has yet to experience the peace which Isaiah envisions.

Is the mountaintop too high to ascend? Is it possible to ask people to set aside old agendas? Is it possible that religious and political leaders can walk together "in the light of the Lord"? Is it possible for old enemies to no longer learn war anymore?

Christians in the Land of the Holy One continue to believe, with all evidence to the contrary, that all things are possible for those who love the Lord because if peace is possible here in Jerusalem, peace is possible for everyone.

Meditation

What will it take to make Isaiah's vision real? Who continues to gain by keeping the status quo? Who loses without peace in the Land of the Holy One?

Prayer

Lord, help me want to see the mountain top. Spirit, guide my feet. Creator, pick me up when I fail and give me the strength of will to take one more step up the mountain. Amen.

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