

First Sunday in Advent – December 1, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2) In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3) **Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.** 4) He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 5) Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Dear people of God,

We've just gone through another thanksgiving shopping extravaganza. I'm not sure when this seemingly American ritual began to take hold in our culture. But for quite some time – the day after Thanksgiving has been regarded as the busiest shopping day of the year. With the passing of time more and more merchants have decided that they just couldn't wait to open their doors on Friday and so the frenzy has begun earlier and earlier.

Merchants eager to ring up end of the year sales hype their products offering prices too good to pass up. Between now and Christmas we will see endless reminders of how many shopping days are left until Christmas. We will be hounded to take advantage of special offers and sales before it is too late. As Christians we realize that such efforts tend to commercialize and trivialize the celebration of Christmas. We decry the materialism ... but the fact of the matter is that we can learn something from the urgency with which the retail business world conducts its business. They have a message which they want to communicate to generate a response in a specific time period and they approach the task with vigor!

If you are a merchant who wants to get in on this shopping extravaganza you've got to begin by getting the word out. You'll tell people the time is short, you'll come up with an attractive offer with the hopes that you will enjoy some profitable results.

This process reminds me of the process which Isaiah spoke about in our text. The Lord showed Isaiah a message. He gave him some words to share. He told him that the time was short, that the Word is powerful and that the results were assured. Isaiah is talking about sharing the Gospel – the Good news of forgiveness and peace until the Lord returns again in glory. The words of our Lord which were recorded for us by Isaiah the prophet encourage us:

Theme: Let's get the Word Out

1. Since the time is short (2a)
2. Since the Word is powerful (3c)
3. Since the results are assured (2b-5)

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2) In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. In some way the Lord showed Isaiah a vision of what the future would hold. He saw what would happen in the last days. Quite naturally one asks the question when or what are the last days that Isaiah was writing about.

Scripture answers that question for us. In (Hebrews 1:1-2) we read **In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.** Peter explained the events of Pentecost which followed ten days after Jesus' ascension as a fulfillment of things that were to take place in the last days. (Acts 2:17) **"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."** These days will end **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory."** (Matthew 25:31)

The events that Isaiah wrote about are events that are taking place right now as you and I await the second coming of the Lord Jesus. We are living in the days when **the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.**

In OT times the temple in Jerusalem was perched on a mountain top. Today we often see churches built on hills so they are visible from afar. But Isaiah isn't writing about a building – he's talking about a gathering of people – the Lord's church. Scripture often uses the picture of a building to describe the Lord's church. Think of how Paul reminded us: (Ephesians 2:19-22) **Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21) In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22) And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

The powerful message of the Gospel has brought us together into the Lord's Church. We have been equipped through that Gospel to walk in the Lord's ways. We have been brought into the peace of God through the Gospel. We have been drawn from among the nations to walk in the light of the Lord. We have become witnesses of the Lord's salvation and have been charged by our Lord to get the word out: (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV) **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**

Our text for today has some encouragement for us as it has reminds us that we are living in the last times – that the time for getting the word to others is limited. We've been reminded of the power of that word as we've spoken about how we have been drawn by it into the Lord's Church and how others have enjoyed the same blessing.

Isaiah recorded a very well known promise about the power of the word when he wrote: (Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV) **As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11) so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

In our text for today Isaiah also writes about the Lord's promises regarding the results of the spreading of his wonderful message of peace and forgiveness. These promises remind us that the Lord will provide the blessings and the harvest when we plant and proclaim his word. Let's take a closer look at the promises of success which are recorded in our text.

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

We've already discussed the fact that these words are describing the New Testament Church – the place where the Lord is present. Jesus has assured us that he is present wherever two or three gather together in his

name. (cf. Matthew 18:20) Wherever the message of the crucified and risen Savior is proclaimed and his sacraments are used according to his command, there God is present with his grace and favor drawing people to himself. Jesus himself said, (John 12:32 NIV) **I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.**" The Lord's temple continues to grow and expand through the proclamation of the Gospel which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. (cf. Romans 1:16)

Isaiah foresaw the day when this gospel would be proclaimed throughout the world. The mountain of the Lord's temple has been established as chief among the mountains. Today there are other spiritual or religious hills and mountains – there are a variety of religious beliefs but none of them are able to compare with the Christian church. None of them proclaim a living Savior; none of them offer the gift of salvation and forgiveness. None of them save.

That's why it is imperative for us to share the message of the Gospel with the nations – it's a message like none other and the Lord has promised to establish it among the nations. When we hear the exciting reports of new missions in our country or Hmong ministry opportunities which are expanding practically in our backyard or the rapid spread of the Gospel in Africa for example we are seeing a fulfillment of the promise: **all nations will stream to it.**

The mission of the church is to share an invitation with the people of this world to enjoy the blessings Christ Jesus has prepared for them. We call this doing mission work or evangelism. Proclaiming God's glory and inviting all to receive his salvation is the chief purpose of the church. We can share that message with the confidence that the Lord will bless it by drawing **Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."**

We see this happening whenever people participate in our Bible information classes prior to becoming members of our congregation or visit our congregation as guests seeking a church home. The people come wanting to know what we're all about as a congregation, wanting to learn more about what the Lord says and we show them his ways just as Isaiah proclaimed when he wrote: **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.** (Again keep in mind that the terms Zion and Jerusalem are speaking of the Lord's people – the church.)

Through the word of the Lord we discover our sins, our need for a Savior, we discover that Savior and all that he has done for us and our hearts are opened to the Lord and filled with a desire to serve him and live in keeping with his ways.

And as Isaiah reminds us his ways are the ways of peace. **He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.**

A portion of this text is inscribed on a stone wall across the street from the United Nations building in New York. **They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.** All people desire peace, but in this world of sin peace can only be established by a balance of power between equally powerful nations or by armed force between unequals. If we keep in mind the fact that Isaiah is talking about the nations who have been drawn into the Lord's church we won't misuse this section of God's word to foretell world peace as so many have erroneously done. Sadly as our Lord has reminded us the last days will continue to be marked out by wars and rumors of war – there will be no such thing as a universal world peace.

The peace that Isaiah talks about as he promises that nation will not take up sword against nation or train for war anymore is the peace which is enjoyed in the Christian church. The peace promised is peace with God

based on Christ and his forgiveness. It is a profound peace which affects what believers do; they live at peace with one another and the world around them. Christians allow the word of the Lord to settle their disputes and differences. His word sets the standard of what is right and wrong, what is truth and error. The Lord Jesus has given us his peace – a peace which is beyond human understanding. This is a peace with God and with each other. Now we enjoy this peace in an imperfect way because of our sins – but when the Lord Jesus comes again to take us to glory we will enjoy that peace perfectly for all eternity.

Only when Christ returns will sinful human beings set aside their sinful natures, and then all hostility and conflict will cease. Believers focus on the real peace within and ahead, not on the false promises of political peace in this world. That's a part of the message we'll be getting out as we continue to walk in the light of the Lord.

Our text concludes with these words: **Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.**

Jesus proclaimed: **I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.** (John 8:12 NIV) Just as the Lord Jesus sent Paul so he has sent us among the nations (Acts 26:18 NIV) **to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**

Our Savior has also called us lights – through him we become the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14-16 NIV) **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."**

Living one's Christianity is not a solo sport but a team effort. We encourage one another to walk in the light. Rejoicing in who we are and what we have in Christ we will be eager to walk together as children of the light. We will sense the urgency of sharing that light and be quick to do it.

This Advent and pre-Christmas season is filled with special opportunities to get the word out – you can do it with your annual Christmas greetings as you share cards with a truly Christ-centered message. You can do it as you invite friends and neighbors to participate in the Advent by Candlelight activity or as you invite them to join you at the Living Nativity hosted by our sister congregation St. Paul's in Howards Grove this weekend. And then don't forget about inviting someone to join you for worship on Christmas Eve or Christmas day.

We've got a message to share; we've got ways to share it. Now let's get the word out because as Isaiah has reminded us:

1. The time is short (2a)
2. The Word is powerful (3c)
3. The results are assured (2b-5)

Amen.