



### Advent Reflection for Monday, December 4, 2023

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Isaiah 2:1-5

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!

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Today's Reflection is by Kallen Tsikalas

In this passage, Isaiah writes about the division of the Kingdom of Israel and how, in time, the warring will cease and the nations will live in peace.

He tells us that the nations will stream to the house of the Lord for instruction, and that when they live in God's word...

*nation shall not lift up sword against nation;  
neither shall they learn war anymore.*

How tragic that 2,500 years later, there is still war in the Holy Land. Today, we witness the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocents in Gaza and Israel. The war goes deep—not only in tunnels and hospitals, but in the psyches of generations of Palestinians and Israelis.

The generations continue to learn war.

And not just in the Middle East. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, right now, war is being waged in nearly 30 countries. We observe this on the Internet and news but also right here at home. In the streets of our city are countless refugees from Central and South America who have fled decades of war and violence in their own countries.

Like generational poverty and racism, generational warfare and its intruding sense of existential danger shapes the beliefs, behaviors, and biology of all who live it. Those affected are conditioned by fear, not hope. They learn to protect themselves at whatever cost, to distrust their neighbors, to stockpile their weapons.

So... what are we to do? How are we to throw off the crushing weight of mindsets and systems that propagate generations of pain, suffering, and war? In these times, what is the instruction of the Lord? Where are the nations streaming to receive this instruction? Where is God?

I have prayed and I have agonized over these questions.

And while I mostly feel a lingering sense of powerlessness, grief, and unease, God has provided me with some embers of hope.

The first is from a NY Times Op-ed I happened upon a few weeks back. It was written by Miriam Udel, a professor of Yiddish culture and literature. Several months ago, she invited a Palestinian friend to her home for Shabbat dinner. When he asked what he could bring, she requested a book about his homeland for her 7 year old son. He arrived with a bag full of books about Palestinian children and their experiences. She commented that in these books, "I saw the Palestinian children's authors of today doing something I recognize from Yiddish children's

literature of the previous century—striving to help children make sense of the world they stand to inherit while writing a better world into being.”

Prof. Udel’s invitation and hospitality, her guest’s openness and generosity, the imagination of those authors writing a better world into being.... To me, these are all evidence of God at work. They are also the work that we need to be doing.

My second ember is a faith-based environmental group that I join from time to time. In this group, we come together to learn about and plan collective climate actions. More importantly, we come together to remember that, as people of faith and spirit, we are connected to something greater than ourselves. While we are finite and may indeed have limited power, God is all powerful! God can work through us and He can carry us through these tumultuous times.

The prayer of St. Chrysostom is my third ember. In this prayer (which I will forever associate with Ron Metzler who brightened the pews and hearts of Holy Apostles), we are assured that...

*And you have promised through your well-beloved Son that  
when two or three are gathered together in his name  
you will be in the midst of them.*

When we gather in the name of Jesus, the one who suffers with us and died for us, the one who transforms death into life, the one whose incarnation we celebrate this season, we are not alone. And we do not need to solve these problems of the world on our own.

God—our creator, redeemer, and sustainer—is with us.



Kallen Tsikalas and her family (Scott, Halcy, and Lulu the dog) have attended Holy Apostles for about 9 years. They are grateful for the spiritual nourishment and grounding that this little neighborhood church with a very big heart has provided them over the years. Kallen loves nature, being in community, feeling wonder, and wandering by foot and in mind.