



## St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

November 30, 2025;

Advent 1 A: [Isaiah 2:1-5](#), [Romans 13:11-14](#), [Matthew 24:36-44](#)

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.” A week ago on Friday, I saw a press release that said that the 270-foot-long United States Coast Guard Medium Endurance Cutter TAMPA had returned to its home port in Portsmouth, Virginia. Do you remember when I was gone for a few days in September? I was on TAMPA as this mission began. At the time, I couldn’t talk about it. With the mission completed, I can. (1) As described in the press release, TAMPA’s journey went from Virginia through the Caribbean, across Panama, into the Eastern Pacific, and back. The high point of the mission came about 270 nautical miles southeast of the Galapagos Islands, when TAMPA intercepted a 40-foot low-profile vessel, recovered 620 kilograms of cocaine, arrested the people on board, and - after it was completely empty - conducted a controlled sinking to prevent the vessel from becoming a hazard to navigation. TAMPA also conducted some non-gunboat diplomacy, meeting with rangers and other officials in the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, and Panama. Though it would have been fun to have been part of all that, I recognize that I have a real job here and was honored to play a small part at the start. With everything going on down there, the safety of members of the crew have been very much on my mind. It was a great joy to receive the press release on Friday. It was even more moving to see a clip from a local news broadcast on Saturday morning which showed huge smiles on the faces of TAMPA’s crew members as they were greeted on the pier by loved ones, happy to have them home in time for Thanksgiving. That was Saturday. On Wednesday, images of the shining face of another young service member in uniform filled the news. Unlike my Coastie seamen, Sarah Beckstrom, a twenty-year-old member of the National Guard, never made it to Thanksgiving and - at least in this life - will never see her loved ones again. Her death is tragic and deplorable on many levels. Sarah Beckstrom is a reminder how every day young people - many of whom just graduated high school and some of whom don’t even have a driver’s license - are putting their lives on the line for us. (Thanks to the East Hampton Driving School and our own Tina Giles, the driving issue is being taken care of at least on a local level, but you get my point. It may be a bit unprofessional but I look at these young service men and women as my kids.)

On paper, my primary mission as a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary is what is referred to as RBS or Recreational Boat Safety. As its name implies, Recreational Boat Safety is about keeping people safe in their motor boats and sailboats and yachts. It’s not supposed to be about supporting crews doing migrant operations and drug interdictions,

responding to and trying to prevent suicides and other tragedies, and overseeing 47 other chaplains from Maine to Puerto Rico who are doing the same things. The primary mission of the National Guard is to respond to national disasters, support communities in need, help with emergencies and if needed support military action, not doing policing or beautification, a polite word for picking up trash. Thinking of the military, one of the primary missions of the military is deterrence, the stopping of war before it starts. Changing spears into plowshares is possible. It is mission focused, both for our mission and God's. Changing spears into plowshares is possible but we first have to change our hearts and minds... or at least open them up and let God do the work.

This is the message the prophet Isaiah was trying to make. Isaiah's world was not all that unlike our own. Empires were fighting for dominance. Israel was a mess. War was always on the horizon and people continually used their religion as an excuse for violence. Into all this, Isaiah prophesied about the coming of God's Kingdom and a reign of justice and peace. Believing this prophecy, believing that swords can be made into plowshares, and believing that we can help that happen ourselves, requires courage. These things require trust: trust that God will intervene, that light will shine in the darkness and that, as countercultural as it may be, the peace of God which passes all understanding can and will prevail.

Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah." In the days of Noah, people were so caught up in their daily lives that they missed seeing the big picture of what was going on around them. They saw no need for the ark, didn't notice the storm clouds gathering, and ignored the first drops of rain. It's not so different today. People are busy getting ready for Christmas. But are they paying attention to everything else? This morning's gospel asks us to do just that.

In our second reading Paul puts it this way, "Salvation is nearer to us than when we became believers; the night is gone; the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." Paul isn't talking about some sort of sentimental reenactment of the first coming of Christ. Paul is asking us - urgently asking us - to prepare for the second. He is telling us to put on our uniforms and get to work. Whether the four candles of the Advent wreath represent four weeks of preparation for Christmas or four thousand years of human civilization waiting for the Messiah, the meaning is clear. Christmas is just around the corner and the time to get ready is now. Remember that the words "Advent" and "adventure" share the same root. Advent tells us that a great adventure is about to begin - and we don't need to go on a ship to the Caribbean or Eastern Pacific to join in. Unlike Noah, we don't have to build an ark. God has given us an ark in the form of a church, a life jacket in the shape of a cross, and armor made of light itself. Advent is the time to put those tools to use.

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1. All information comes from an official press release received after the mission had been completed. None of this was made public during the mission itself and no confidential or classified information was shared. For the press release, see: <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4339375/coast-guard-cutter-tampa-returns-home-after-67-day-counterdrug-patrol-in-the-ea/>