

Preparing for Peace
Isaiah 2:1-5
Romans 13:11-14
December 1, 2019

What time is it? A simple question that children often answer in relation to holidays or daily activities. If we were to ask the children here now, chances are they would say, “Christmas.” Retailers might also respond that way, even as early as October this year. The apostle Paul writes that it is time to be awakened! The sleep that he mentions is like slumber, a drowsy Christian malaise, uninspired to do anything, for the longer it has been since the birth of Christ, the first Advent, the more we move like sleepwalkers.

What time is it? It is God’s time, Kairos. Advent is not just a day, but a whole season of four Sundays and weeks to reflect, ponder, prepare our hearts to receive the Messiah. Paul talks of the time being now, already, for the first Advent has already happened and the second coming was on his mind. We live in this in-between time, between the already and the not yet. Advent, like Lent is a season of preparation, and we prefer to skip right over it to get on with welcoming baby Jesus. But today’s texts do not let us skip Advent, for today these words are about the future, not the past, about the Judgment Day, not the Birthday.

Recently I completed the Wednesday morning Bible study on the book of Revelation with some of you. Many people shy away from Revelation because of its focus on final things—the eschaton—the final reckoning. Some people have imposed their own predictions of the end of the world upon interpreting Revelation. None of them have been correct. John’s revelation, his vision, is similar to Isaiah’s seen word. The words of Revelation encourage the faithful to keep the faith, do not lose heart. Keep on doing the things that make for faith—tell the story of God’s love, pray, care for the least of these. These are the ways to keep Kairos.

Most people use Advent to prepare for a perfect Christmas. We buy perfect gifts for perfect people and decorate with the perfect candles and perfect ornaments on the perfect tree with perfect lights and plan perfect parties. All of this work is the perfect way to celebrate except the only thing perfect about it all is the One who comes to save us from our illusions of perfection. Paul points out our sin, the shadow side of our lives, the combination descriptors of reveling and drunkenness numb our minds, the debauchery and licentiousness corrupt our bodies, and the quarreling and jealousy deteriorate our souls, dividing us from one another. We are broken people when the works of darkness inhabit our lives. Yet we seek to hide our imperfections in tinsel and wrapping paper. We tie ourselves up nicely with bows and wish one another Merry Christmas while our interior lives are in the shadows.

Instead, Paul urges us and so do I, to prepare for peace, making the way of the Lord, the Prince of Peace. How might we live differently this season, in light of the second coming? What are the questions I need to ask? How might I not quarrel with family members this holiday season? How might I put on gratitude rather than jealousy? How might I stay sober instead of being tempted to drink too much at that party? How might I be reconciled to the one I hurt? How might I forgive and be forgiven?

Isaiah too sees right through our darkness as nations, reminding us that we are not the ones who will judge or arbitrate. We are not in charge. Only God can do those things. Rather on the Lord's mountain we are taught, we learn to walk in the ways of the Lord.

In New York City on across First Avenue, across from the United Nations is the Ralph Bunche Park. Bunch served the UN from 1944-1971, as Under Secretary General from 1968-1971, and in 1950 was the first African-American recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Bunch received that peace prize in 1949 for his work on the armistice in the Middle East. "The Park is so close that people often think it is part of the UN, but it is not. But the mistake is natural, because the park is also home to the famous "Isaiah Wall" which so many people naturally associate with the United Nations and its peacekeeping. There, carved into granite, is the old prophesy of Isaiah 2:4."ⁱ

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.

"Any Christian picture of international peace must take seriously, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer does, that 'we are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.' A just and durable peace means more than peacekeeping and emergency aid. It means stopping the wheel of injustice and poverty; it means a renewed global architecture."ⁱⁱ

Injustice and poverty, like war and rape, are traumatizing and create victims who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Serene Jones, in *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* describes persons suffering from PTSD as having *disordered imaginations*.ⁱⁱⁱ In her study she notes "three insights that are useful for the theological-imaginative task.

- 1 The person or persons who have experienced trauma need **to be able to tell their story**.
- 2 There needs **to be someone to witness this testimony**, a third-party presence that not only creates the safe space for speaking but also receives the words when they finally are spoken.
- 3 The testifier and the witness (and we are both) must **begin the process of telling a new, different story together**; we must begin to pave a new way through the brain. This is aimed at breaking the cycle of repetitive violence."^{iv}

Jones goes on to say that the church's responsibility as people of faith is to be the storytellers, weavers, artists, poets and visionaries who take the repetitive violence and reframe it in the context of the story of our faith. We are called to help write the scripts of the Christian imagination as it seeks to bring order to this disorder, and we must do so in a manner that seeks the flourishing of all people.

Here is the way one person and his community have done this work. In 2008 creative sculptor and activist Pedro Reyes was concerned about the high rate of deaths by guns in his home city of Culiacan, Mexico. So he created "Palas por Pistolas initiated in the city. The botanical garden there had been commissioning artists to do interventions in the park and his

proposal was to work in the larger scale of the city and organize a campaign for voluntary donation of weapons. Several television ads were prepared inviting citizens to give up a gun in exchange for a coupon. Those coupons could be traded in a local store in exchange for domestic appliances and electronics.

1527 weapons were collected. 40% of them were high power automatic weapons of exclusive military use. These weapons were taken to a military zone where they were crushed by a steamroller in a public act.

The pieces were then taken to a foundry and melted. The metal was sent to a major hardware factory to produce the same number 1527 shovels. The tools were made under specifications such as a handle with a legend telling the story.

These shovels have been distributed to a number of art institutions and public schools where adults and children engage in the action of planting 1527 trees.

This ritual has a pedagogical purpose of showing how an agent of death can become an agent of life.”^v

Swords used to cut into flesh maiming and killing now have become plowshares cutting into the earth to plant and grow food to give life. Spears once used to pierce hearts are now pruning tools to cut away the bad, unproductive branches and stimulate growth, bearing fruit to feed people. Refashioned as weapons of righteousness these tools now provide economic relief.

Most of these verses in Isaiah are also found in Micah, chapter 4. Micah is the prophet that speaks of *what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our Lord*. These are the ways of the Lord, these are how we are to spend our time until that second coming of the Lord. For to think that world peace is up to us is a farce. What we are called to do is walk in the ways of the Lord, follow as disciples. Paul says to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He uses this same kind of language when he talks about baptism and says to clothe yourselves with Christ. Wear Christ everywhere. By the nature of your baptism, you have already experienced dying with Christ, now fully embrace your baptism by living with Christ.

When the world comes to seek and learn from the Lord, then the world shall live with Christ, and God’s word will bring an end to war and there will be world peace, with God as judge and arbitrator, doing so non-violently. Christ is the Prince of Peace as Isaiah prophesies in chapter 9. Christ is the one whose authority grows continually and he shall reign in endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

So what does it look like to be a Christ-follower? How do we put on Christ?

Look at Pope Francis—he shows kindness and grace in the same way he has received it. He invites others to follow Christ by being a servant. One favorite story of this unlikely servant leader and Argentinian cardinal (*Jorge Mario Bergoglio*) occurred the morning after his first

night's sleep as Pope Francis. "In the morning he went outside of his new simple guest room and discovered a Swiss Army guard, who traditionally protects the pope. "Who are you?" Francis asked.

"I am your guard" came the reply.

"Where is your chair?" asked Francis.

"My commandant says we must stand while we guard." Then Francis told the guard there was now a new commandant.

"How long have you been here?" asked Francis.

"All night," replied the guard. The pontiff told the guard to wait a minute, then came out with a chair for him to sit on.

When Francis asked him if he had had something to eat, the guard started to say, "My commandant..." then trailed off.

"Wait a minute," said Francis again, then came back with a sandwich, and the two sat and ate together."^{vi}

Christ's kingdom is meant to change everything, even something as simple as sharing bread. So we follow Christ, and we are transformed, and the world sees the Word of the One, the Messiah, the Christ, who is Lord of our lives.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.





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ⁱ Robert Joustra teaches politics and international studies at Redeemer University College. “The Isaiah Wall and the World: Peacekeeping In A World Without Peace,” on *Shared Justice* website which is an initiative of the Center for Public Justice, Feb 25, 2016. <http://www.sharedjustice.org/international-justice/2016/3/9/9qzsirg94m42ufohhb6z74d0vv2zmm> accessed 2019.11.30. *Shared Justice* is an online publication and community for Christian twenty and thirty somethings interested in the intersection of faith, politics, and justice.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2009), 20.

^{iv} *Ibid*, 32.

^v Pedro Reyes, art project Palas por Pistolas, Culiacan, Mexico. <http://pedroreyes.net/palasporpistolas.php>

^{vi} Story about Pope Francis recounted by Jim Wallis in *Christ in Crisis : Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2019), 125.