

**“God’s teachable kingdom”**  
**Isaiah 2:1-5, Romans 13:11-14**  
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Introduction

Scholars think the book of Isaiah was written about 700 years before Christ. The author writes about historical events of his day, but also tells of our utter dependence on God, and the supremacy of God’s plans. In the days to come, not once upon a time, but in the days to come, a new age pregnant with possibilities and rich with promise. But in the days to come something exciting shall happen, when is not known. There is an anticipation of a coming. A coming that heals. For “shall” is not a prediction, but an affirmation. “Shall” is one of the strongest words in the English language. No place for doubts, no conditions for occurrence, no room for alternative views. Shall means it will definitely come to pass. Because shall distinguishes between hype and hope. Hype, the wishing for something that never comes. Hope, the expected coming of something that satisfies.

Movement 1

The Mount of the Lord’s House shall stand firm above the surrounding mountains, and all the nations shall gaze upon it. But it is not to Jerusalem that the nations stream. The nations stream instead to God’s presence. It is not to our church that people will stream, but to God. Jerusalem will be the meeting place of God and all humanity. We do not tell folks to come to our church. We tell them to come to Jesus.

Chris Rice says it best, in one of my favorite hymns.

Weak and wounded sinner,  
Lost and left to die,  
O, raise your head for Love is passing by  
Come to Jesus,  
Come to Jesus,  
Come to Jesus and live  
Now your burden's lifted,  
And carried far away,  
And precious blood has washed away the stain... so  
Sing to Jesus ,

Sing to Jesus ,  
Sing to Jesus and live  
And like a newborn baby,  
Don't be afraid to crawl,  
And remember when you walk sometimes we fall... so  
Fall on Jesus,  
Fall on Jesus,  
Fall on Jesus and live  
Sometimes the way is lonely,  
And steep and filled with pain,  
So if your sky is dark and pours the rain... then  
Cry to Jesus,  
Cry to Jesus,  
Cry to Jesus and live  
O, and when the love spills over,  
And music fills the night,  
And when you can't contain you joy inside... then  
Dance for Jesus,  
Dance for Jesus,  
Dance for Jesus and live  
And with your final heartbeat,  
Kiss the world goodbye,  
Then go in peace, and laugh on Glory's side... and  
Fly to Jesus,  
Fly to Jesus,  
Fly to Jesus and live  
Fly to Jesus,  
Fly to Jesus,  
Fly to Jesus and live

## Movement 2

In God's society, all people shall receive instruction and walk in God's paths. The reason for conflict and war is that people and nations take things into their own hands.

It may be our reluctance to pursue God's way that gives Advent its greatest potency. If all of us had the least bit of passion for Isaiah's vision, and were less hung up with protecting our little fiefdoms, we wouldn't have to wake up for Advent. We could skip all its dire texts. We could ignore the whole season and pleasantly go about our daily routines, going to work each day, and shopping for groceries.

On God's Holy Mountain, we neither lie to each other nor say things like, "you lied to me." We do not say things like, "I don't like do-nothing conversations," or, "you made a mistake." We do not get mad when we do not get our way. On God's Holy Mountain, we do not prey on each other's faults, but instead pray for each other. For the word Jerusalem is related etymologically to the Hebrew word for peace, shalom. It has no relationship to Hebrew words for purity or faultlessness. Peace, not purity or faultlessness, is what you find on God's Holy Mountain. On God's Holy Mountain, we learn God's words, not words of war. Not words of accusation. We look for Good News in the world. We abandon the yes-but mentality of the postenlightenment. We look for Good News.

On September 9, 1997, a gigantic crane cut through the red tape involved with erecting a new sculpture in Washington DC, and lowered a four-ton sculpture to its permanent cement base.

Titled "Guns into Plowshares," this 16-foot-high steel plow blade consists of 3,000 handguns welded together to form the distinctive shape of the well-known farm implement. The artist and her son worked for two and a half years with the Police Department. They molded handguns that had been surrendered by local residents.

This simple plow announces a prophetic hope: hope for the day when God will get God's way. In God's society, gunpowder will become grain to feed the hungry. Nations will be infected with love for each other. Armies will develop amnesia and forget how to fight.

Isaiah knew that this hope might not come to fruition in his lifetime. He lived and spoke in real time. All he could do was use future-tense verbs and admonish people to start walking in the light. The sculptor, a mother, understood the challenge of creating an art object intended to persuade people to stop killing each other. Has it had an impact? Gang members did gather around the plow to discuss making peace on D.C. city streets. But they soon walked away from the effort, unable to let go of certain grudges.

People want to come to Jerusalem, this city, this highest-of-the-mountains city, to learn from God. People eagerly seeking to learn God's ways and paths. The American Quaker artist Edward Hicks (1780-1849) may have painted the quaint and memorable "Peaceable Kingdom," commemorating another passage from Isaiah, but here we have the "Teachable Kingdom." I don't believe I have ever

seen this kingdom represented artistically but someone should do so. What would the "teachable kingdom" look like to you? We would see people in the attire of Africa and Asia, in Western suits and shorts, with accents and strange-sounding tongues, of every skin color and size and shape, taking hold of each other to *learn*. *We would see people with multiple college degrees learning from people who have never seen the inside of a school. All arrogance is gone.* We know that the Kingdom of God may not be far off when nations want to *learn* rather than rattle sabers; when they want to *be instructed* rather than show off their glories.

### Movement 3

We all have passions. Passions that can be creative or destructive. Take the words of a coach to a child after a baseball game. Words after a pop fly is dropped. "Wake up out there," or "nice try!" Words after a batter has struck out. "What is the matter with you," or "way to go, you went down swinging!" Words that tear down or words that build up. It is not enough to put away spears and swords as an act of romance or goodwill. There must at the same time be production of instruments of life. The economy is transformed, and the earth is also transformed, from battleground to fertile garden. We do not stifle our energy, but turn it into creativity. Instead of spending our energy throwing up barriers and objections and finding fault, we spend our energy supporting the passions of others.

People grab each other to come and be instructed in Jerusalem; then instruction "goes forth" from Jerusalem; then people have a *political* harmony. Instruction and education precede international harmony. People come, learn, and then are harmonious.

<sup>11</sup>Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup>the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; <sup>13</sup>let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul seems to be reminding us that life is far too precious to allow us to put up with business as usual. Even good-sounding legislation and sensible justice are not enough. Just ask the mothers of young children caught in the crossfire of gun battles on the streets of the nation's capital. There is a more godly way of life available. Take Isaiah's words to heart. Yearn for real peace. Wake up, for goodness' sake, lest you squander your days on the wrong things.

In Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*, a young woman named Emily dies at the age of 26. She asks the stage manager narrating the play if she can return for a

brief visit with her family. He grants her the wish, advising her to choose the least important day in her life -- which "will be important enough," he says. She chooses to return on her 12th birthday, only to find her father obsessed with his business problems and her mother preoccupied with kitchen duties. Emily exclaims, "Oh Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, 14 years have gone by. I'm dead!" Unable to rouse her parents, Emily breaks down sobbing. "We don't have time to look at one another. . . . Goodbye, world! , . . Goodbye, Mama and Papa. . . . Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you! Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it -- every, every minute?"

It is this incapacity to attend to the important things in life that brings urgency to Advent. We sleep through God's signals of alarm and act as if today is like every other day. But if we are casual with today, what chance is there that we will be careful with our lives? What hope is there that we can live less selfishly and more peacefully? In an attempt to rock us out of these complacent ways of living and believing, Apostle Paul tells us it is time to put away jealousy and quarreling. And to put on Jesus, making no provision for our own selfish desires.

#### Conclusion

In this the season of Advent, we come to Jerusalem, the teachable kingdom, to learn peace. We shall wake up, turn our guns into plowshares, and pray for each other instead of preying on each other.

And then nation shall not lift up sword against nation any more, and all will stream to the house of God.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's children say ...