

Feasting on the Word[®]

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Feasting on the Word[®]

Preaching the
Revised Common Lectionary

Year A, Volume 1

DAVID L. BARTLETT and BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR

General Editors

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Publisher's Note

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary is an ambitious project that is offered to the Christian church as a resource for preaching and teaching.

The uniqueness of this approach in providing four perspectives on each preaching occasion from the Revised Common Lectionary sets this work apart from other lectionary materials. The theological, pastoral, exegetical, and homiletical dimensions of each biblical passage are explored with the hope that preachers will find much to inform and stimulate their preparations for preaching from this rich “feast” of materials.

This work could not have been undertaken without the deep commitments of those who have devoted countless hours to working on these tasks. Westminster John Knox Press would like to acknowledge the magnificent work of our general editors, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. They are both gifted preachers with passionate concerns for the quality of preaching. They are also wonderful colleagues who embraced this huge task with vigor, excellence, and unfailing good humor. Our debt of gratitude to Barbara and David is great.

The fine support staff, project manager Joan Murchison and compiler Mary Lynn Darden, enabled all the thousands of “pieces” of the project to come together and form this impressive series. Without their strong competence and abiding persistence, these volumes could not have emerged.

The volume editors for this series are to be thanked as well. They used their superb skills as pastors and professors and ministers to work with

writers and help craft their valuable insights into the highly useful entries that comprise this work.

The hundreds of writers who shared their expertise and insights to make this series possible are ones who deserve deep thanks indeed. They come from wide varieties of ministries. They have given their labors to provide a gift to benefit the whole church and to enrich preaching in our time.

Westminster John Knox would also like to express our appreciation to Columbia Theological Seminary for strong cooperation in enabling this work to begin and proceed. Dean of Faculty and Executive Vice President D. Cameron Murchison welcomed the project from the start and drew together everything we needed. His continuing efforts have been very valuable. Former President Laura S. Mendenhall provided splendid help as well. She made seminary resources and personnel available and encouraged us in this partnership with enthusiasm and all good grace. We thank her and look forward to working with Columbia's new president, Stephen Hayner.

It is a joy for Westminster John Knox Press to present *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* to the church, its preachers, and its teachers. We believe rich resources can assist the church's ministries as the Word is proclaimed. We believe the varieties of insights found in these pages will nourish preachers who will “feast on the Word” and who will share its blessings with those who hear.

Westminster John Knox Press

Series Introduction

A preacher's work is never done. Teaching, offering pastoral care, leading worship, and administering congregational life are only a few of the responsibilities that can turn preaching into just one more task of pastoral ministry. Yet the Sunday sermon is how the preacher ministers to most of the people most of the time. The majority of those who listen are not in crisis. They live such busy lives that few take part in the church's educational programs. They wish they had more time to reflect on their faith, but they do not. Whether the sermon is five minutes long or forty-five, it is the congregation's one opportunity to hear directly from their pastor about what life in Christ means and why it matters.

Feasting on the Word offers pastors focused resources for sermon preparation, written by companions on the way. With four different essays on each of the four biblical texts assigned by the Revised Common Lectionary, this series offers preachers sixteen different ways into the proclamation of God's Word on any given occasion. For each reading, preachers will find brief essays on the exegetical, theological, homiletical, and pastoral challenges of the text. The page layout is unusual. By setting the biblical passage at the top of the page and placing the essays beneath it, we mean to suggest the interdependence of the four approaches without granting priority to any one of them. Some readers may decide to focus on the Gospel passage, for instance, by reading all four essays provided for that text. Others may decide to look for connections between the Hebrew Bible, Psalm, Gospel, and Epistle texts by reading the theological essays on each one.

Wherever they begin, preachers will find what they need in a single volume produced by writers from a wide variety of disciplines and religious traditions. These authors teach in colleges and seminaries. They lead congregations. They write scholarly books as well as columns for the local newspaper. They oversee denominations. In all of these capacities and more, they serve God's Word, joining the preacher in the ongoing challenge of bringing that Word to life.

We offer this print resource for the mainline church in full recognition that we do so in the digital

age of the emerging church. Like our page layout, this decision honors the authority of the biblical text, which thrives on the page as well as in the ear. While the twelve volumes of this series follow the pattern of the Revised Common Lectionary, each volume contains an index of biblical passages so that all preachers may make full use of its contents.

We also recognize that this new series appears in a post-9/11, post-Katrina world. For this reason, we provide no shortcuts for those committed to the proclamation of God's Word. Among preachers, there are books known as "Monday books" because they need to be read thoughtfully at least a week ahead of time. There are also "Saturday books," so called because they supply sermon ideas on short notice. The books in this series are not Saturday books. Our aim is to help preachers go deeper, not faster, in a world that is in need of saving words.

A series of this scope calls forth the gifts of a great many people. We are grateful first of all to the staff of Westminster John Knox Press: Don McKim, Jack Keller, and Jon Berquist, who conceived this project; David Dobson, who worked diligently to bring the project to completion, with publisher Marc Lewis's strong support; and Julie Tonini, who has painstakingly guided each volume through the production process. We thank former President Laura Mendenhall and former Dean Cameron Murchison of Columbia Theological Seminary, who made our participation in this work possible. We thank President Steve Hayner and Dean Deborah Mullen for their continuing encouragement and support. Our editorial board is a hardworking board, without whose patient labor and good humor this series would not exist. From the start, Joan Murchison has been the brains of the operation, managing details of epic proportions with great human kindness. Mary Lynn Darden, Dilu Nicholas, Megan Hackler Denton, and John Shillingburg have supported both her and us with their administrative skills.

We have been honored to work with a multitude of gifted thinkers, writers, and editors. We present these essays as their offering—and ours—to the blessed ministry of preaching.

David L. Bartlett
Barbara Brown Taylor

A Note about the Lectionary

Feasting on the Word follows the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) as developed by the Consultation on Common Texts, an ecumenical consultation of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada. The RCL provides a collection of readings from Scripture to be used during worship in a schedule that follows the seasons of the church year. In addition, it provides for a uniform set of readings to be used across denominations or other church bodies.

The RCL provides a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm response to that reading, a Gospel, and an Epistle for each preaching occasion of the year. It is presented in a three-year cycle, with each year centered around one of the Synoptic Gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew, Year B is the year of Mark, and Year C is the year of Luke. John is read each year, especially during Advent, Lent, and Easter.

The RCL offers two tracks of Old Testament texts for the Season after Pentecost or Ordinary Time: a semicontinuous track, which moves through stories

and characters in the Old Testament, and a complementary track, which ties the Old Testament texts to the theme of the Gospel texts for that day. Some denominational traditions favor one over the other. For instance, Presbyterians and Methodists generally follow the semicontinuous track, while Lutherans and Episcopalians generally follow the complementary track.

The print volumes of *Feasting on the Word* follow the complementary track for Year A, are split between the complementary and semicontinuous track for Year B, and cover the semicontinuous stream for Year C. Essays for Pentecost and the Season after Pentecost that are not covered in the print volumes are available on the *Feasting on the Word* Web site, www.feastingontheword.net.

For more information about the Revised Common Lectionary, visit the official RCL Web site at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/> or see *The Revised Common Lectionary: The Consultation on Common Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

Feasting on the Word[®]

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 2:1-5

¹The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In 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.

³ 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."

Theological Perspective

We are accustomed to hearing words, and often we call on others to listen with us; but in dramatic fashion the prophet Isaiah speaks of "seeing the word." Seeing the word, a new idea for many of us, points to a new level of discernment. There is "a seeing beyond seeing," learning to see reality at its depth, as we learn that "there is often more there than meets the eye." In a profound sense the emphasis is not on human imagination or gifts of intellect, but on anticipation that the word concerning Judah and Jerusalem will be revealed by God. God's servants are expected to wait for God to reveal the word concerning their situation of faith. God shares the word with God's people, and they not only listen to the word, but also "behold the word."

Quite often in the Old Testament we are told that God's word is enacted. God's word does not return empty but accomplishes its intent. God's word happens as the word becomes deed. The word, as promise, is always looking toward fulfillment. "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Isaiah enables his community to see that the rich have been exploiting the poor and worshipers have been preoccupied with the scrupulosity of sacrifice and obedience; but he goes beyond that.

The genius of Isaiah is that he also paints a vivid picture of God's corrective message to the people and the new reality it will create. Along with his

Pastoral Perspective

By the time Advent comes around, we have already been primed by our culture for a Big Event. Catalogs arrive, showing us pictures of happy families in matching pajamas enjoying a quiet moment together. Commercials splash across the television screen, promising love and contentment in the form of new gadgets. Store displays evoke nostalgia for childhood wonder. We are invited to lean together toward the coming Big Event, when fantasies will be fulfilled, and dreams may yet come true.

In the face of such messages, we preachers have the task of articulating a message that is both faithful to our Scriptures and responsive to the deep, true needs of people who are longing for something Big. We fail when we take the easy road of simple assault against the cultural and commercial messages. Yes, our culture is celebrating a giddy overhyped pseudo-Christmas while we are attempting the more serious task of observing a holy Advent, but the reason the cultural messages are so powerful is that our human yearning is so real, and so profound.

Isaiah holds up a vision of the true. He takes us to a mountain and shows us what our hearts are actually tuned for. First, he shows that God's presence, by God's own initiative, will become more evident and compelling: the Lord's house will be established as the highest of the mountains, and the nations shall stream

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴He 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.

⁵O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

Exegetical Perspective

This oracle is often called the “floating oracle of peace” because it also appears in Micah 4:1–3. It is apparently part of a general prophetic tradition that was available to both of these prophets as a promise of the eschatological fulfillment of God’s kingdom. Presumably this is especially important in times of difficulty when present circumstances seem unpromising; confidence that the future belongs to God gives hope in the present. In Advent we anticipate the birth of Jesus into a world in need of light (v. 5). Every generation needs assurance that the powers of the world—whether the Romans of Jesus’ time or the principalities and powers of our present age—do not determine the future.

In Isaiah’s time the difficult present circumstances were probably associated with the Syro-Ephraimitic war, when the northern kingdom of Israel and the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus tried to force Judah into an unwise alliance in opposition to the Assyrian Empire. When these foes finally laid siege to Jerusalem, King Ahaz turned to the prophet Isaiah for advice and assurance.

In response, Isaiah offered a vision of promise that has a number of elements. The first is that regardless of where power seems to lie in the present, the day is coming when God’s reign will be established for all humankind to see. God’s dwelling on

Homiletical Perspective

As the Old Testament reading for the First Sunday of Advent, these lines from Isaiah are Scripture’s first words to the church in Advent. They are, therefore, the very first words to be heard by the church as its new year begins. The curtain rises. A prophet walks onto the darkened stage in a circle of light. He begins to sing—of a mountain, and of nations streaming to it willing to hear holy instruction and be judged by it, willing also to make peace with each other. As the song is ending, another sound rises, the ringing sound of hammers striking metal. It fills the room. That sound is the first in the church’s new year.

So vivid and appealing is the image of swords and spears beaten into plowshares and pruning hooks that we may be inclined to camp the whole sermon there. As usual, the preaching will likely be truer and richer if the larger sweep of the text is taken into account. So frame by frame, how does the vision proceed?

It begins by declaring that in God’s future, the holiest ground becomes highest ground—above all other elevations will be the place of awe. From this place the Presence will call to the nations, who will flock to it. A new community is being gathered to the Holy, a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual convergence. Coming nearer, they urge each other on and call out to each other the longing that draws

Isaiah 2:1-5

Theological Perspective

contemporary Micah, he enjoins Judah that God requires justice, mercy, and even more, to walk with God. It is in this context that he articulates a theology of “the last days.” The word of God provides the basis of a new future in which the temple of God becomes the focal point of the world. There is a break, a discontinuity, with the way things were. The good news is that tomorrow will be different from yesterday, because the future is based on the promises of God, which are always new.

There is no basis in the contextual situation of Judah for expecting or planning a new future. Without God’s promise as basis and ground of hope, the future is bound to be a repetition of the past. With that promise, there is a new point of departure, because the future is based on the faithfulness of God. The new future that Isaiah offers as promise is that the temple of God will be lifted high above all the mountains and all people, including the Gentiles, will stream toward it. The promise comes in the midst of the waywardness and idolatry of the people. The promise is not consonant with the practice and the conduct of the people, but the prophet, who is able to “see beyond seeing” and somehow able to see God’s hope for the people, articulates a message that transcends the reality on the ground.

Jews and Gentiles alike stream toward God’s holy mountain. Why? What compels them? One insight that emerges here is that, at our core, human beings need instruction from YHWH. “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’” (v. 3). The people are in need of instruction and direction at crucial junctures of life, but they are tired of false instruction and faulty directions from their culture’s gods. So they set their gaze on the temple of YHWH atop the highest mountain, and together they become the pilgrim people of God.

There in the mountain of God they will encounter and meet God, who speaks not only in words but in acts. They will hear not only with their ears but with their hearts—and this God, whose actions they see and whose will they hear in their hearts, will be an all-welcoming God. The prophet offers a clue that the instruction of God revealed and hidden in the Torah is not only for Israel, but for all the nations. God’s word, indeed God’s law, is not the exclusive right of any particular people, but is “spoken” for all who stream toward the mountain of God.

God’s word always comes as law and gospel. The law here comes not in an exhortation but in a

Pastoral Perspective

to it. People everywhere will be drawn to God, from all nations, all cultures, all races. They will converge out of a shared desire for divine instruction. Here is a revolutionary contrast to current complacency and cynicism. The preacher might find real fire for preaching if he or she simply contemplates how radical a promise this is—that we will all seek God together, and God will be present. Here Isaiah is declaring that one day we can quit trying to get by on scraps and remembrances of spiritual experiences. God’s presence will be made manifest. God’s house will be established, and we shall stream to it. We will press toward it together to be taught and to be changed.

Then the word of the Lord will go forth, and from that word will come justice; God will judge between the nations and settle disputes. The word of the Lord will make an actual difference in the way the world works: inequities will be balanced, shackles will be loosed, wrongs will be set right. Out of this justice will come transformation—weapons of violence will be turned into instruments for nourishment. The nations will put their swords down, and will not train for war anymore.

Consumerist visions of the good life may seem to prevail in our culture at this time of year, but Isaiah’s prophecy will stand up to any of them. This picture of unity, of justice, of shared openness to the divine way, and of peace speaks to some of our deepest hopes. The preacher would do well to find ways to build bridges between the listeners’ culturally driven anticipation and the deeper yearnings that lie beneath. How might the many pictures of happy families and yuletide gatherings actually speak to something real, like the desire for harmony across many divisions? How might the nostalgia for Christmases past and the idolization of childhood wonder represent our desire to believe again in things that seem impossible to us as adults—like peace on earth and goodwill for all?

Once tapped, these yearnings may reveal something raw and disillusioned. As much as we may long for a day when weapons are laid down, hearts are transformed, and peoples are drawn together, we find it hard to believe that such a day will actually come. Even to speak of the end of time, or of a time beyond time, when God will set everything right, is a stretch for many of us. Isaiah’s vision may be even more preposterous than that. He announces that this remarkable transformation will take place “in days to come.” “In days to come” may not be specific, but it does imply that such transformation will come within history.

Exegetical Perspective

Mount Zion will be central and elevated over all other claims to prominence or power (v. 2).

The temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem was far more than a matter of local geography. It was the locus of God's presence in the midst of God's people. To envision Zion as elevated above all other mountains and the focus of pilgrimage by all peoples (vv. 2b–3a) is not so much a political claim by Jerusalem as a spiritual claim of God's presence as the true center to which all nations will eventually flow. Nations will always be in conflict unless God's reign is recognized beyond that of kings and God sits on Mount Zion enthroned above the ark of the covenant, reigning over all other claims to power. Already the prophet Isaiah understands God's ultimate purpose to bring salvation to all the nations and not simply to Israel. This universal quality is appropriate to Advent, where Christians celebrate the birth of the child proclaimed with the words "Peace on earth; goodwill to all people."

A part of that hoped-for future day is that all humanity will also recognize the need for God's direction in their lives. Verse 3 actually contains four synonyms that stress the ways in which the direction that comes from God will finally prevail: "he [will] teach us his ways," "we [will] walk in his paths," "out of Zion shall go forth the law;" "the word of the Lord [will come] from Jerusalem." Ways, paths, law, word—all express the direction that comes from God and counters the alternatives that tempt our allegiance in the world. The ways of this world are self-centered and idolatrous. This verse reorients the faithful to the alternative world created by covenant partnership with God. God is the true source of guidance in human life and community. In Advent, God's word incarnate is about to become flesh in our midst, countering the wisdom of this world. The Gospel of John expresses this hope in its profound claim that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (1:14).

This new focus brings two results. The first is judgment. Nations and peoples are judged and rebuked (v. 4a). Those in the world who claim authority apart from God's reign are exposed and judged. The world is not the source of true authority, and it is not the source of hope for the future. The world is the source of conflict, the sword, the spear, the making of war.

In God's reign these implements of conflict will be transformed into tools of community (v. 4b). Swords will become plowshares and spears become pruning hooks. Nations will trade in their swords and war will not be the focus of nations. This

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them toward a common center: to hear the instruction of God.

This instruction, it turns out, includes arbitration. The Holy One "shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples." God, in other words, will not only speak, but will listen to the grievances, disputes, and concerns of the nations, and will adjudicate. These two words—"judge" and "arbitrate"—are the only active verbs assigned by the text to God. The nations and peoples are about to make peace, but the gift given by God is justice. The ending of inequity is ground for the ending of violence. The old assertion is true: there is no lasting peace without justice.

The nations accept God's judgments. One result, the only one named, is disarmament, inevitably leading to new capacities for tending the land and feeding the people. Since the reasons for envy, greed, resentment, retribution, and fear have been abolished, weapons are irrelevant. Since aggressions have been rendered absurd, resources once diverted for battle are available now for the provision of health, life, and communal growth. The text imagines *conversion* in its literal, material sense. Instruments of taking life are converted to implements for sustaining life. The economy is converted. The world's curriculum is converted from learning war to learning the ways of God.

Lest we get too dreamy about an idyllic future, the text hands us a present-tense invitation. Having pointed to a day when "the peoples" will say to each other, "Come, let us go to the mountain," the text now urges *us*: "Come, let us walk in the light." Whatever peaceable future there is to be, those who hear the promise are enjoined to go walking toward it "in the light of God."

Preachers face an odd challenge when a text points to the future of God. We are preaching a dream. In what way is the dream true, and in what realm? Isaiah is apparently proclaiming future wonders within human history. Real nations will bend their weapons toward the cultivation of the actual earth. On this First Sunday of Advent, preachers are not likely to declare that this vision will be historically and universally so.

Then what will we say? Strategically, it might be wise to say how absurd it all sounds. During the reading of the text, did no one in the room laugh out loud at the naiveté of it? Did no one smirk? Texts such as these cannot be preached effectively or truthfully without acknowledgment of the unbudging, bleak realities they claim will disappear. Sorrow and

Isaiah 2:1-5

Theological Perspective

proclamation: the people will make peace, as swords become plowshares and spears become pruning hooks. Once again the promise of peacemaking does not match the reality on the ground. The enemy is preparing for war, but the word goes forth that God's will is peace, and the people are called to join God in God's work of peacemaking. Because the prophet has his eyes on God and not merely on the situation—because he is focused on God's instruction and direction—he can actually see the word of God, the *promissio dei* in action. The word of encouragement for those who seek instruction at the house of God is not to focus on the present existential situation in such a way that they lose sight of the God who speaks and acts.

We are promised by God that as God's gift of peace becomes real among us, Jews and Gentiles alike will stream to the mountain of God to be instructed and directed by God. The people who are taught by God will seek peace and practice violence no more. Weapons of violence will be destroyed. To receive divine instruction is to share in a vision of a coming realm of peace in which God will judge among the nations, and nations will not learn war anymore. The way forward is to walk in the light of the Lord.

NOEL LEO ERSKINE

Pastoral Perspective

Herein lies another important pastoral insight. It is so much easier to pin our hopes on Christmas gifts and holiday feasts than it is to open ourselves to the possibility of believing in the seemingly impossible. We have been disappointed so many times by failed peace treaties abroad, and by divisions within our own culture, and by fractured relationships within our own lives. We know firsthand the destruction that conflict inflicts, even if we have never lifted an actual sword. It is important for the preacher to acknowledge the reality of disillusionment and disappointment, understanding that these apply not only to the lofty ideas of world peace, but also to some of the most intimate relationships in congregants' lives. As Christmas approaches, some in our churches will be feeling these losses acutely; it is important for the preacher to be honest about realities and attentive to the fact that happy visions of hope can make old wounds throb.

In the end, what Isaiah offers is not only a vision of global transformation, but an invitation to live toward that day. "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!" However hard it may be to believe that a new and longed-for reality will take hold some day, there is power in walking in God's light now, one step at a time. Congregants may feel cynical or hopeless about the prospects of Isaiah's vision, but in his invitation lies enormous and practical power. The future belongs to God, but the first step toward that future belongs to those who have glimpsed God's light and are willing to trust that enough light lies ahead.

STACEY SIMPSON DUKE

Exegetical Perspective

transformational image has fueled the imagination of many generations. It is the inspiration for a large sculpture that stands outside the General Assembly tower at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The hope is that through the cooperation of nations, the tools of community can replace the weapons of war.

The occurrence of this same striking image in Micah 4:3 suggests that this was a common expression of hope within the wider prophetic movement during Isaiah's time. It moves beyond the particularities of immediate conflicts between peoples and nations to find unity in a common hope for the alternative world of God's reign. In Advent we lift our sight beyond the challenges and crises of our own time to participate with the generations since Isaiah in the hope for a world transformed by the final goal of peace and harmony toward which God is moving us.

In the end, the establishment of God's reign is a matter of walking "in the light of the LORD" (v. 5). Light is a strong image in the prophecies of Isaiah, in 9:2, where God's light gives the people hope, and in 42:6, where God's people are called to be a light to the nations. Light is also, of course, one of the primary symbols of Advent. This First Sunday finds the Advent community brimming with confidence. The light of the world is coming in Jesus Christ, and the world will be transformed. We light the candles of Advent as a foretaste of the light that is to come in the Christ child. The darkness of the world will not prevail. Conflict is replaced by community, and those who would oppose the advent of God's reign will be judged and overcome. God's light will not be denied. The reign of God will come.

BRUCE C. BIRCH

Homiletical Perspective

doubt need a voice in the room, or the promise is flippant. Advent proposes impossibilities. The fitting first response is bafflement. The season keeps giving us cause to blurt out the question of Mary: "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34).

We are in the presence of a mystery. God's own justice and peace will occur among the nations "in days to come." What days? How? Perhaps all we can say is that the vision describes what God is, in fact, at work in the world to do. It is what Jesus apparently meant by "the reign of God," which is already present and at work among us, though not yet in fullness. We saw it in Jesus, who converted fear to love, lunacy to sanity, enemies to friends. He died surrounded by swords; a spear stabbed him; nails tore him. They entered infinite love, which "melted them into light."¹

Isaiah's vision should not be preached in the imperative. The text does not scold or admonish; it lifts a gleaming promise of what God will do in days to come. If the sermon blasts the nations or lectures congregants about being peacemakers, it violates the text's intention. True to the season, the sermon will express the deeps of human longing, and point to the dreams and promises of God for the world. In the end, the sermon will also be, as hope always is, invitational. "Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD." God's future casts its gleam into the present. We move toward God's future by making our choices—personal, relational, political, communal—in its light.

At St. Louis University is a small Jesuit chapel that is creatively lit. The light fixtures are made of twentieth-century cannon shells, converted. Emptied of their lethal contents, they now hold light for people to pray by. In such light we pray and live. And having laid our own weapons down, we bear witness to the promise of greater transformations in days to come.

PAUL SIMPSON DUKE

1. This image was used by George Arthur Buttrick in an unpublished sermon.