

A friend in Church gave me a new Calendar she had made. Which is an important reminder for this morning, because the Church, not just our church, but all people of Christ follow a different calendar. Most of the world today, at least Financially follow the Calendar with 365 days arranged in 12 months, with 52 weeks of 7 days, that begins January 1st and ends December 31st. But the Church is different, for us the last day of the year was yesterday, and today, being the first Sunday of Advent is the First Day of the Year. Just as Genesis begins with Night anticipating the First Day, we have the month of Advent to prepare for Christmas. But there is something different, as many of us have celebrated 70, 80, 90 Birthdays AND as Christians we know that Advent is leading to the Coming of our Savior.

Someone challenged me this week, that in over 38 years of Sundays, I have preached many different parts of the Bible, on many different things, but they could not imagine I ever preached on the Second Coming. There are those who have a day and time when they met Jesus, when they came to faith. Being a second generation pastor, I have always known God, not just known there is a God, or about God, but as a companion whom I walk with and struggle against, and love, knowing God loves us. Because of that there have been times when I questioned what God wanted, or what I was to learn from a sacrifice, as well as times of great Joy and Affirmation of God's love.

Jesus' SECOND COMING has for me been connected to JUDGEMENT DAY. At times I believe, we each have our own Judgement Day, when we individually die and will stand before our Creator/Judge and before our Savior. At other times, I believe there may come a Cosmic Judgement Day for all the world. Once, I was leading a Bible Study, and we came to that passage in Matthew 25 of Judgement Day, separating the Sheep and Goats. A good friend stated that he had always lived in fear because of that passage, that he would be found to have been a GOAT all along. Not GOAT as in The Greatest Of All Time, but that he had failed to care for others in need, hungry or in prison. AND I was stunned because I have always understood that to be a vision of Affirmation, that we are Christ's Sheep, we do daily care for others and ache for them, living our lives in giving.

But with the Start of ADVENT, Preparation for the Coming Arrival of Jesus at Christmas, what occurs to me is that this is not 2000 years ago, on the opposite side of the world, in the Empire of Caesar Augustus, this is not that FIRST INCARNATION which Isaiah here, prophesied of 750 years before JESUS CAME. Instead this is JESUS' SECOND COMING, or if we want to be mathematic correct/ scientifically accurate Jesus' 2022nd COMING! With that realization, comes fresh understanding, that the Messiah who comes is all we know and envision: loving, pure and divine, but rather than INNOCENT comes with having endured the Sacrifice and Heartache of 2022 years of being abandoned and betrayed, sacrificed, dead and buried and resurrected, only to try a fresh/ once again with us here and now. JUDGEMENT DAY? Having a Savior, who does all of that, not naively, but with experience that all humanity has been through life, over and over and over again AND NEVER GOT IT RIGHT, but still COMES ANEW, that is Judgement by GOD ALMIGHTY!

In Bible Study a few weeks ago, someone asked: "The 10 Commandments say 'Thou shalt not Kill' so why is there so much killing, so many wars in the Bible?" This is a great question, without easy answers. One of the theories suggested when I went to Seminary is that "Rather than the 10 Commandments being foundational agreements for what we aspire to in human society these 10 were the most common sins." What a different world this would be if we all lived 1) in relationship to One True God, 2) if we bowed and sacrificed to no others, and 3) refused to take God's name in vain, 4) if we did not lie, 5) steal, 6) covet, 7) commit adultery, 8) if we honored our parents, 9) kept a day of Sabbath, and 10) if we did not kill!

But at the same time, the Bible is Truth. A true history of the world we have made of Creation, is that we have allowed killing, and the killings have become more numerous.

This week, the Nightly News shared the statistic, that there have been 608 MASS SHOOTINGS this year, that is of 4 or more people at a time. They averaged that as 49 persons per day, 17,885 lives killed.

Specifically referring from this morning's Scripture: 750 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah was The High Priest at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, when he was also called, not only as Priest of the Temple, but as Prophet of God. Isaiah has this odd grammar, saying "The Word that Isaiah Saw," ordinarily we would say "The Word I Heard." The Hebrew words actually meant: "What Isaiah envisioned," as if Isaiah's Vision was of a new way of seeing, changing our perspective,... in order to approach God we must see the world differently. Critical to understanding Isaiah is for us to use our mind's eye, to imagine, wonder if.

I have yet to find one, among old farm equipment in Arizona, but what we need to see before us this morning, in the place of the Communion Table at the Center of Worship, is what we think of as a Plow. Not a John Deere, not an Allis Chalmers Engine, but a wooden V-Shaped plow as dragged by horse or human labor, at the center of which, to cut open the earth was a sharpened iron blade.

In 2005, I went to the war-zone of South Sudan, where they had no Plows. Their only means of farming, was to crawl on their hands & knees, poking a finger in the soil to plant a seed. 1200 BC was the beginning of the Iron Age, transforming agriculture, creating not just crops, but excess food, which created wealth and prosperity for Jerusalem.

However, by the time of Isaiah there were regular wars. For War, Kings and Armies needed metal for swords and shields. IRON was literally a triple-edged sword, because Iron made warfare more destructive and more costly, and using Iron for weapons/ denied iron for plows. Israel under Solomon had become a major Arms Dealer selling Chariots, horses, Swords and shields to all sides. Isaiah's prophecy was not just poetic phrases about peace, but weighing the needs of masses of people for food versus weapons for war.

President Eisenhower is admired both as having been President & Allied Forces Commander in WWII, but I read an account recently that his family believed his greatest legacy was a speech he gave in 1953, titled "THE CHANCE FOR PEACE." In this speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Eisenhower described DEMOCRACY as choosing to govern World Affairs according to 5 PRECEPTS:

1. No people can be held as evil, for all humanity shares the hunger for peace, fellowship and justice.
2. No nation's well-being can be achieved in isolation, but only in cooperation with fellow nations.
3. A nation's right to a form of government and an economic system of its choosing, is inalienable.
4. Any nation's attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government, is indefensible.
5. A nation's hope of lasting peace can only be based on just relations and honest understanding with all other nations.

However, the President named the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, as leading to Atomic War; or the burden of an arms race wasting their peoples. SO instead of A Sword versus A Plow, a Shield versus a Pruning Hook, this was President Eisenhower's assessment of THOU SHALT NOT KILL:

- The cost of a Heavy Bomber is the equivalent of a new school in each of 30 Cities; or
2 electric power plants each serving a major city; or
2 state-of-the-art fully-equipped Public Hospitals; or
constructing 50 miles of super highway.
- We pay for a single fighter plane with a half-million bushels of wheat.
- We pay for a single Destroyer with new homes for 80,000 people.

When Jesus comes, when we face the FINAL JUDGEMENT will we be Sheep or Goats, will we have killed?