

Christmas is coming soon; first Sunday of Advent is in a couple of weeks. The Christian lectionary includes the Jewish prophets, as a prelude to the birth of Jesus. So we hear from the prophet Isaiah this morning; it is a beautiful vision: “The wolf and the lamb will feed together, no one will hurt or destroy (Is 12)... With joy you will draw from the wells of salvation (Is 65). The vision is idealistic, an analogy that is trying to show *possibility*, even for a lion and lamb... (We *have* seen animal videos with all sorts of animals playing together, sleeping together, quite possible if raised together from a young age!).

Note that Isaiah’s visions for peace are stated in FUTURE tense verbs: “In that day you *will* say, I *will* trust, with joy you *will* draw water, the wolf and the lamb *will* feed together! It’s nice to have hope and encouragement for an ideal, something that we trust God can help us realize, also something we work for, something we live into (one commentator calls this “intentional futuring!” (Helping the envisioned future to happen!)

But the thing I want to emphasize this morning is that any movement toward peace must involve Honesty, especially about injustice, about Sin and Evil. Sin and Evil are religious words that we don’t like to focus on. But they are very real; we just describe them in other ways: Lies, Abuse, Hurting, Trafficking, Violating, Killing... most every lead story in news is dealing with Sin! So let’s keep it simple and use the words sin and evil; Sin can have all sorts of levels, many ways to harm others, while evil surely refers to the worst levels, like murderous or demonic actions.

One example of something I consider evil, that I can’t get out of my head, because of so many videos, is this current news about the US government bombing boats that are *suspected* of carrying drugs! They are *alleged* drug dealers. With no proof and no due process, we are killing human beings who look like drug runners. Whatever

happened to the high road of “innocent until proven guilty,” or the usual methods of intercepting them with Coast Guard boats ... or if they are too fast, then following them with a helicopter, seizing and searching the boat when they get into port. Besides the legal problems of waging war, and doing so in *international* waters, there is the moral question about killing (“Thou shalt not kill!”) And even if they are found to be drug runners, is it a just punishment to kill them? We wouldn’t kill them at our seaports, then why would we kill them out in open waters?

*Some* would say it is a just punishment, an eye for an eye, (Drugs killed my loved one, so I should kill you for bringing and selling drugs in my country.) But no one on those boats actually killed anyone here taking drugs. Many people die of alcohol overdoses, and we don’t exact the death penalty on the liquor store owner.

In my opinion, and in my following of the Lord Jesus, all hurting and killing is a form of sin. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeated the ancient command “Thou shalt not kill,” and then he went further... to say we should control our anger, and not even insult others! Jesus was always anti-war and violence. Christians have had a hard time justifying war. Any call for war must be a “last resort!” War as last resort and only as self-defense is the way of our Lord Jesus. This is the high ground. Israel, for example, has always claimed to take the high ground, responding strongly in *self-defense* against attacks from Arab countries around them. But recently, the destruction of Gaza has seemed more like genocide, far more than self-defense, far more than an eye for an eye. Russia has tried to claim self-defense... pointing to an encroaching military build up in Eastern Europe. But even the most die-hard Russian defenders do admit that Russia *started* the war with invasion, they started a “war of aggression.”

Back to the USA. By changing the name of the Defense Department to the “War Department,” *our* government is almost rejoicing in getting more aggressive, starting with Mr. Hegseth lecturing generals about fat troops, and perhaps even *starting* a war now with South American countries... The War Department is taking the initiative to bomb and kill in the Caribbean, and then shows videos of it, showing how lethal is our war technology. Even if we try to justify war with the old saying “an eye for an eye” (a rule of *proportionality*), why have we sent huge aircraft carriers and bomber jets to threaten little speed boats? This is clearly *disproportionate*, an example of sin that must be resisted, must be stopped. Some in Congress are working on that now.

I have argued that we need to name sin and evil, in order to confront it, resist it and stop it. But there is danger in naming people, or parties, as sinful and evil. when we are dealing with any suffering, we all have a tendency to externalize evil, to insult others; It must be someone else’s fault, so we blame others, and even demonize others. Take this recent shutdown of government. The republicans called it a democrat shutdown, and the the democrats called it a republican shutdown. It sounded like a childish blame game: Who is the most stubborn? Who won’t discuss it? Who is the most sinful? Blame the other party.

Regarding the drug problem in the USA, it is easy to externalize the problem: it is all the fault of the country making the drugs, like China, or South American Countries, but let’s face the reality of “supply and demand”... If there were no demand for drugs in the USA, there would be no suppliers bringing drugs past our borders. There is a demand for drugs. I believe it is safe to say that a demand and need for altered states of mind is connected to mental illness and spiritual illness. As people of faith we must keep trying to bring up our

children and youth with peace and security, knowing that they are loved for who they are, “just the way they are” and for who they are becoming. When young adults grow up feeling unloved, alienated, and lonely, of course they turn to drugs to escape their feelings, or even worse they may let their frustrations and anger about life take action in attacking others, or attacking themselves.

So we are honest about sin and evil, both external and internal, and then we fight against them, to right wrongs, and to heal inner suffering. We resist wrongs and injustices, and we try to heal fears and anxieties... we try to stop external evil, but then, of course, we need to *fill the vacuum* with things that are good, things that are peaceful, hopeful, loving, and joyful.

When we pray and sing our songs of faith, we are literally filling our heads, our thoughts, our bodies with the spirit of love and grace. The last hymn we sang is all about the Lord Jesus and his idealistic ways: Lord of all hopefulness, all joy, all kindness, all grace, all gentleness, all calm. These ways of Jesus are our vision, our goals that we work toward, and also the Holy Spirit that we receive and share.

When we focus on a God who is the spirit of Love, Goodness and Grace, we join our hearts and minds and strength to this Spirit. Yes, God does help those who help themselves.. we need to collaborate with God, with our Lord Jesus even as we sing of God’s vision of a better future. Isaiah spoke in the future tense, and when we sing and pray about a better future, we are helping to create that future (“intentional futuring!”) We say God IS restoring, God IS healing, God IS convicting us about sin. We say that we SHALL drink the waters of joy, that God IS working God’s purpose out! AMEN.