The will to Dream – Advent 1 2025

Isaiah 2:1-5, Mark 13:24-37

November 30, 2025

In today's OT passage, Isaiah sees a vision – nations streaming to the mountain of God, people eager to be taught the ways of God, nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, never lifting a sword against another nation again, so transformed that they don't even learn how to make war ever again. (PAUSE)

Does Isaiah's vision seem as naïve and Pollyanna optimistic to you as it does to me? (PAUSE) I mean really, Isaiah, how has that worked for the world so far? All we have to do is pick up a newspaper or our own prayer guide to see that we're still nowhere close to Isaiah's vision. If we're honest, we have been disappointed over and over again by failed peace treaties around the world, by increasing divisions in our own country, and even by our own fractured relationships. (PAUSE)

Is it any wonder that it's tempting to pin our hopes on the Christmas the world -and major retailers - offer us – beautifully wrapped gifts under a perfectly trimmed tree, a Christmas meal at a stunning table that rivals anything we see in Southern Living, happy family members embracing the holiday without a cross word or a fuss? (PAUSE) How has that worked out at your house the last few years? Not only does this vision never describe our house, for the past several years, one part of our family or another has had COVID and we haven't even been able to get together. (PAUSE)

Our theme for Advent this year is "The Will to Dream," and today's focus is Vigilant Hope. As people of faith gathered here today in the midst of challenging times, what does that mean, does Isaiah have a word for us today? (PAUSE)

It will help us to remember that the world was very challenging in Isaiah's day too. Go home today and read chapter one of Isaiah to see how bad things were and how disappointed God was in how God's people had behaved. After a failed attempt at a political alliance to thwart the

Assyrians, Jerusalem fell under Assyrian control. In the aftermath of this defeat, King Ahaz of Judah went to Isaiah for advice and assurance.

"In the days to come," Isaiah begins – "not today – not this week, not next month, perhaps not even this year, but one day – in the days to come, the future will belong to God." Regardless of where the power seems to be in the present, the day is coming when God's reign will be established for all human kind to see. And God's ultimate purpose – bringing salvation to all nations will come to pass. Those who claim authority apart from God will be exposed, and implements of war and conflict will be transformed into the tools of community. [i] (PAUSE)

It is interesting to note that this passage in Isaiah is also found in Micah 4:1-3, letting us know that Israel called upon this vision on more than one occasion in their history. I don't know about you, but even if seems overly optimistic, it is a message I need to for our day as well.

The reality is, this vision is still aspirational, isn't it? When Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us in the flesh, he knew that faithful people had been waiting for a

long time for God's peace and reign to come. He was aware that people in Isaiah's time waited and that those in his own time were being asked to wait. And we're still waiting today, aren't we?

Here is a real world example. The image you see on the screen is a sculpture called **Let** Us Beat Swords Into Ploughshares. The sculpture, which stands outside the UN Building in New York, was a gift to the United Nations – from the USSR in 1959. (PAUSE) We aspire, but we sure aren't there yet, we're still waiting.

But here's the thing, Jesus challenged us to do more than wait, he commanded us to wait well – to be alert and ready, and not to give up on being faithful or to become weary in doing good. What does this doing good entail? Micah reminds us, "What is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

You see, Jesus' call in our New Testament lesson to "stay awake" is not a warning of punishment, but an invitation to prophetic attentiveness. In a world often

numbed by distractions and coercive power, vigilant hope is a discipline. It is the decision to notice, to expect, and to participate in the unfolding of God's kingdom. Hope dares us to keep watch, not for escape, but for emergence.

Today's passages remind us that Advent hope doesn't wait for comfort to act. It stirs, it protests, it builds. It gathers people into movements of mercy and imagination, shaping peace with hands and hearts. Friends, Isaiah's dream is not a solo endeavor, it's community work, it is not automatic, it is participatory.[ii] (PAUSE)

I was delighted to see how closely our advent theme matches the Church of the Brethren theme for the upcoming year, Imagine. At a message at the District Conference just a few weeks ago, the moderator encouraged us to Lament, to Repent, and to Reinvent. Isn't this just what Isaiah is calling us to do as we begin the Advent season? It is okay to lament where we are in these challenging days – God knows and allows us to be honest about the pain and difficulties we face. But we

don’t’ stop there. We repent of the roles we have played, we repent and ask God to forgive us, and then we reinvent – with God’s help and vision, we imagine how a new world can be, and we work toward it. (PAUSE)

So we begin the season not by trying to predict the future but by preparing for it. Hope is our wakefulness. Hope is our refusal to let empire have the final word. Hope is the will to dream and the courage to begin again. We’ve seen this in Charlotte over the last few weeks when citizens learned that ICE was coming to their cities. Hundreds of people came out to be trained to join the safety patrols who are fanning out across the city each day to make sure that everyone can get to work and school safely... and home again at night. School PTA’s joined in.

Similar efforts are underway in Durham and Raleigh where there were trainings and a protest march. One woman reported, “A friend messaged me to say her daughter's school wasn't letting the teens leave campus for lunch because their city feels too dangerous. A teacher in my hometown told me her students aren't

showing up. 21000 students were absent in Charlotte yesterday."

A friend of mine who lives in Charlotte volunteered to be a driver – she picked up children and took them to school so that their parents wouldn't have to be exposed. The children had their parents' names and phone numbers written on their arms in Sharpie marker in case of the worst case scenario. One pastor in the area, whose church has a large Hispanic population, spent the day shopping for groceries for his families at local Hispanic groceries stores. Instead of delivering them mid-day, he took the groceries home and kept them until after dark – he felt it would safer for him and for his families to deliver them then. This is Vigilant hope, hope that believes that things can get better when we work together with compassion and imagination. It is hope that faces pain, it is hope that does the right thing, even when it's hard. (PAUSE)

Friends, how might God be calling us to have the will to dream? How might God be calling us to remain faithful and to act with vigilant hope? May we listen with

discernment and may we respond as God leads. And all God's people said, Amen.

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[i] Bruce Birch, Exegetical Perspective Feasting on the Word, Year A Volume 1, 3.
[ii] The Will to Dream" Commentary and Preaching Guide – week 1. Illustrated Ministry, 2025