SERMON
St. Peter's UCC
December 7, 2025
Second Sunday in Advent: Peace
"Not Likely?"

Scripture:
Isaiah 11:1-10 The peaceful Kingdom
Psalm 72:1-4, 18-19
Matthew 3:1-12 The proclamation of John the Baptist

Prophets of the Old Testament would arise in the world of Judaism at times when their leaders, or all the people, would stray too far from the ways and Spirit of God. At such times, God would send a prophet to warn them not to continue moving away from their covenant with God. Then the prophet would offer words of hope by letting them know that the covenant wasn't lost; that it could be healed and rebuilt if they just turned back to God.

But sometimes the prophets provided a different function for God; different than just calling the leaders and people back to the ways of God; back into covenant with God. Sometimes, instead, prophets, filled with the Spirit of God, would see past the circumstances of the world at that

time, or the near future. Sometimes the prophets would speak the Word of God about times far beyond circumstances in the world. Instead, they would speak of end times; ultimate times, when the covenant with God has moved beyond what it normally was; times when a new covenant would lead to a peaceful Kingdom; when all that is accursed in the world will be gone, and God's ways and Spirit will be found everywhere; everywhere in hearts and minds and words and actions and relationships, even on a world scale.

Such a time is found in the words of the prophet Isaiah in this morning's Old Testament reading. He says, "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him….On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious." Isaiah, speaking for God, prophesies a peace so profound upon the earth that, in trying to describe it, he says that, "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid…"

Yes, the earth will be profoundly changed, for, says Isaiah, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

These are amazing words; amazingly beautiful words, and profound; full of hope and peace. But it’s a good thing that these words from God, these promises from God, are found in the Bible, because if your average Joe spoke so optimistically about our world, if your average person on the street spoke of such a close covenant with God and with heaven, most people would give a look that says “Not likely.” For most people, they certainly hope for such a time, but to speak so confidently, to speak with assurance and eloquence about peace on earth, goodwill toward all, well that’s not always an image people can easily embrace.

However, at the same time, aren’t we all quietly, even desperately hoping for such a time on earth? We need that hope; hope for a peaceful kingdom, as much as we need food, shelter and clothing.

So the question is, who will dare hope? Who will speak of hope? Who will believe in hope? Who will strive for, and work toward, a hopeful way of being? The first settlers on this hill lived hopeful lives

when they built a church. Those early churches, including this church, built in 1835, were signs and signals of people who proclaimed life as more than what we will wear or eat. Those earliest people of God in Chester Springs embraced Isaiah's vision, and found its embodiment in Jesus Christ, for they chose to express the "body of Christ" right here.

When our congregation first formed enough way back then to discuss building a church with the Lutherans on the hill – that was in 1812 – can you imagine the conversation? In the midst of such discussions, houses needed to be built and maintained, and fields needed to be cleared. Prayers for rain humbly understood their vulnerability to the weather, as they hoped for food enough to survive the winter. Mountain lions, bears, wolves…..and then somebody said to somebody else, "Let's take time to build a church and honor the Sabbath."

How in the world did they get past looks that said, "Not likely," or words that said "Forget it, I can't dare think beyond building my fence or I can't dare think beyond putting food on the table…..I can't dare think and hope and pray such big things like a church."

Yet, we know that the history of Christianity is filled, thank God, with those who dared hope and believe. Shepherds in a field excitedly made known what they had heard and seen in the field; of angels, "a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God," with words of peace on earth, goodwill toward all. For 1800 years after those shepherds, many dared hope and believe, and here on this hill, after much discussion, they too dared to hope in a vision of peace and goodwill, and to build a church to house their beliefs and hopes; to share God's vision for our world of struggle.

Faith, found on a beautiful hillside; hardly unlikely; not unlikely at all, for we are living proof that it is true.

In the 1400's in Germany, someone read Isaiah - the same passage we heard this morning - where it says, "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him." Jesse was the father of King David, and Joseph, the husband of Mary, was of the lineage of King David. That is why they

had traveled to the little town of Bethlehem, because, the Bible says, Joseph "was descended from the house and family of David."

That person who read Isaiah, way back in the 1400's, understood how unlikely – actually, how amazing, how miraculous - it was that a Savior should come to us, especially from the little town of Bethlehem. He took the idea of the shoot, the branch, that comes from the lineage of Jesse, and expanded on a feeling he had of the wonderful, the beautiful, the joy-filled truth of Isaiah's prophecy. And then he expressed that truth entering our world in the most unlikely of ways; as a rose on a tender stem "amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night."

In this season of Advent, God calls on us, and the faithful forbears hope for us, that we also will dare believe in roses of winter; of tender stems springing forth in the cold of night. It would take the worst cynic; the most resigned person, to not wish for true believers in this world; for those who have not given up; who proclaim hope for light in darkness; beauty in gray days; love in empty lives; joy out of sadness, and peace out of the ashes.

In this season of Advent, pray that we may never give up God's heavenly vision for us and for our world; peace on earth; goodwill toward all. For some, they see only an unlikely future for our world, but for the believer, trusting in the loving power of God, we are to be living proof of unlikely things; expressions of hopes without limits; reflections of peace in a world desperate for peace.

The story of our faith is filled with the unlikely; from amazing Bible stories, to the persecution of Christians in the ancient world, to God's Word finding a home in Penn's Woods, and yet, here we are, in all the uncertainty of our world. We are here, and God is with us, now and forever, and a child was born for all the world; as unlikely as a rose in winter. How truly blessed we are! Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.