

Advent Devotional December 5, 2018

Scripture

Isaiah 2:1-4

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

² In 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."

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

⁴ He 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.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith, Professor of Urban Ministry / Metro-Urban Institute Advisory Council

Isaiah's prophecy outlines a time "in the last days" that will be characterized by widespread conflict, but also by a systematic seeking of *higher ground*. According to the passage, many people in their seeking will look specifically to expressions of religious life for that higher ground. "God's temple," says Isaiah, will be "the highest of the mountains . . . exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it."

An expanded appeal to faith realms that transcend socially-bounded identities and worldviews seems almost counter-intuitive within a contemporary context characterized by cultural captivity and political cooptation of religious life. Yet Isaiah's prophecy anticipates God's temple as a primary source and site of leadership within just such a world.

But what is also clear in the text is that this breakthrough of spiritual awakening will come to pass through God's doing, and not ours. Isaiah says that God will teach us the pathways to walk, and God's word and judgment will transform swords and spears into instruments of peace and livelihood.

Rising above our inherent social antagonisms and hostilities will require God-sized solutions. Isaiah assures us of God's leading—and that in seeking God's face we will find promised deliverance (cf. Ps 27:8; Matt 7:7).

Prayer

(Derived from a hymn by Johnson Oatman, Jr.)

Lord, by your grace,
May we press on the upward way
New heights to gain with every day,

And praying as we onward bound,
Lord plant our feet on higher ground.