

Romans 13:11-14 NRSV
Isaiah 2:1-5 (Tyler Mayfield version)

The matter that Isaiah son of Amoz envisioned concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

*In future days, the mountain of the house of The Living God
will be established at the head of the mountains
and will be lifted up above the hills.
All the nations will flow to it like a river.*

*Many peoples will come and say:
“Come, let us ascend to the mountain of The Living God
to the house of the God of Jacob.
Then, God may instruct us in divine ways
that we may walk in divine paths.”
For out of Zion instruction will venture forth,
the word of The Living God from Jerusalem.*

*The Living God will maintain justice among nations,
and mediate for many peoples.
And they will crush their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning knives.
A nation will not lift up a sword against a nation;
and they will not learn again war.*

House of Jacob, Come, let us walk in the light of The Living God.

Today’s scripture passage can be a hard one to hear, and one that may even make us roll our eyes a bit. As much as we want to hold onto hope, hold onto that very optimistic ideal that one day nations will come together, weapons will not only be put away, but will literally be torn apart and put to other uses that are not destructive or violent, that war will be no more... It can be hard to hear these words of hope and optimism about the future to come when we look around our world today and see just how far off we truly are.

Whether we’re thinking globally or just within our families, the holiday season can bring out mass amounts of anxiety and stress within us, despite the beautiful Christmas lights, cheery music, and overall glitz and glam the stores throw at us. No matter how cheery the exterior may be, we still have to contend with the not so cheery parts of us if we want to be faithful to walking in the light of our Living God or holding onto hope this season.

Even in Isaiah's time, things were not going well when he spoke these words to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. You see, the people were just on the verge of the Syro-Ephraimitic war where the Assyrian Empire was trying to overtake the land where Israel and Damascus were. As Jerusalem was attacked, King Ahaz turned to Isaiah for words of advice and assurance and these are the words the prophet told him. This vision of peace is not only found here in Isaiah 2, but also in Micah 4, so these words of peace and hope hold special value in the tradition of our prophets and continue to hold special value for us today.

So how do we hold onto hope for this vision of God's kingdom to come, this vision of peace and goodwill on earth? How do we hold the cheery glitz and glam alongside the stress and anxiety this season can bring up?

One way to hold onto this hope is to follow the directive Isaiah gives at the end of this passage, "Come, let us walk in the light of the Living God". While this directive isn't the magical fix that will bring about peace on earth and goodwill to all, it is a step we can take to pull ourselves out of the swirling negative mindset and grasp onto that hope and vision that God promises us.

God promises us that peace and justice and mercy will be present on earth in the fullness of time, God also reminds us that we are co-creators in this work and can take tiny steps now to help prepare for this idyllic future to come.

So how can we walk in the light of our Living God?

One way to do this is by remembering that we are all, every single one of us, beloved children of God. And as beloved children of God, we're called to show love to everyone. So when the family gathering is starting to get heated and your particular family member that you always disagree with starts an argument, maybe don't engage with the need to prove them wrong and destroy them. Maybe instead, listen to them and try to understand their point of view and engage with them in a way that shows them they are still a beloved child of God. Or if the conversation is just outright harmful, cause those happen too, then find a way to change the subject without treating that person as a lesser human?

Another way to walk in the light of our Living God is to actively work in our world to start bringing out God's reign of peace and hope. Whether this is going down to volunteer at Delonis to serve a hot meal and engage with our house-less siblings in ways that reminds them the world has some hope to give. Or by attending a protest that advocates for housing equity and providing housing to those most in need. Or by writing to our government officials about gun safety and updating our gun laws to better protect our young and vulnerable children. There are so many opportunities and actions that can be taken, so find one that brings you hope and use that as a way to walk in the light of our Living God this season.

Maybe your walk simply needs to be surviving this holiday season and that's okay too. We are in the face of so many different crises, it's frankly overwhelming sometimes. The mental health crisis and cost of living crisis alone are enough to stop me in my tracks. If your current path makes the bright Christmas lights and the joy and hope in the air all feel a little too much, a little too out of reach, a little too overwhelming, it's okay to focus on yourself and making it to the next day. As much as our holiday season is full of joy and hope, it is also full of grief and heartache. We can tenderly hold those emotions together and simply focus on walking through the day ahead, one day at a time. Hope doesn't exist hand-in-hand with joy and cheerfulness, hope can exist within heartache and anger as well, and deserves a space within those emotions.

So my hope for you all is that you find what feels right for you this season for walking in the light of our Living God. Find that activity or place that brings out a spark of hope amidst the commercialization, the cheeriness, or the dreariness of this season.

As you think about this, I want to leave you with a blessing by Jan Richardson, called “Blessing of Hope”

BLESSING OF HOPE

So may we know
the hope
that is not just
for someday
but for this day—
here, now,
in this moment
that opens to us:

hope not made
of wishes
but of substance,

hope made of sinew
and muscle
and bone,

hope that has breath
and a beating heart,

hope that will not
keep quiet
and be polite,

hope that knows
how to holler
when it is called for,

hope that knows
how to sing
when there seems
little cause,

hope that raises us
from the dead—

not someday
but this day,
every day,
again and
again and
Again.

Amen.