**Sermon for Sunday 27th November 2022 - 1st Sunday of Advent: Hope**

**Let us walk in the light**

**Text Isaiah 2: 1-5**

**Rt. Rev Hamish Galloway**

This is the first Sunday in Advent. The theme is hope, the text is Isaiah 2: 1-5.

**Introduction**

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning ‘coming’. It is the time in the church when we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ and also think about being prepared for the second coming of Christ (our New Testament readings today – Matthew 24:36-44 and Romans 13: 11-14 – both relate to the second coming). But today I want to play with this word advent a little bit, thinking of how it forms the first part of our English word ‘adventure’. Adventure has similar origins in the Latin and means: *an unusual and exciting or daring/risky experience.*

The birth of Jesus fits the description of adventure because

1. It was unusual! In fact unique, God born into human flesh, once in history – therefore very unusual.
2. Exciting: this whole idea of God with us, reaching out to us, making contact….

There is a movie called Contact, starring Jodie Foster, where contact is made with extraterrestrial intelligence – word gets out to the general public and elicits high levels of excitement.

There was excitement back then with Jesus as well, angel song and extravagant presents, prophetic words and God’s anointing.

1. Daring and risky – that God would put his beloved son into the hands of fickle and sin infested human beings!

So this Jesus, Christmas, Advent thing is an adventure – unusual, exciting and daringly risky!

*And* he is inviting us – I want you all, all of you, to come on this adventure with me. Do you want to go on an adventure? Jesus is inviting us to join him on an adventure. Let’s keep this in our minds as we explore the text today.

1. **The context, then and now**

The original hearers of this text were people of the Southern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC, where they were in exile in Babylon. They were refugees in a foreign land, desperately seeking hope for the future!

We are the hearers of today – does it have a universal hopeful ring about it? Yes it does! While the world is such a better place than it was all those centuries ago, and we have made so much progress, we - the human race – are so prone to taking detours down dangerous roads towards polarization and war! As the shocking wars of the world today, headlined by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, rage around us, the words of the prophet have universal relevance:

*‘He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for weary peoples.*

*They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not take up sword against nation,*

*nor will they train for war anymore.’*

That is as relevant today as it was then!

1. **A joint effort required.**

It is tempting when things get tough to call out to the Lord: ‘Come on Lord, fix this!’ or ‘Where are you Lord, how long do we have to wait?’

I preached a sermon like that here a few weeks back, the resounding theme ‘How long do we have to wait for you to act, O God?’

Joyce Lockhart correctly pointed out to me at the door that the opposite is the truth – God is ready and waiting for us to act. He has given us all that is needed for justice and peace one earth, yet we don’t act – he is saying ‘how long do I have to wait for you humans to act!?’

At the Methodist Conference in Kerikeri this week, one speaker said this:

‘God is a verb. If we break it down, the first two letters spell ‘go’ and the last two letters in reverse spell ‘do’. God is calling us to join in ‘going’ and ‘doing’ with the purpose of peace and justice!

You know the old Irish joke where the priest is out visiting and comes across Paddy in the front garden. ‘That’s a good garden you and God have got going there Paddy,’ says the priest. ‘Well Father, you should have seen it when God had it on his own,’ replies Paddy!

This idea of join effort permeates the Isaiah text (in comparison with the New Testament texts, that simply call for God to rescue!). There is this call and response quality to the text as follows:

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| The Lord | ‘establishes the temple’ |
| The People | ‘come’ |
| The Lord | ‘will teach them his ways’ |
| The People | ‘will walk in his paths’ |
| The Lord | gives the law, word and judgement |
| The People | will beat swords into ploughshares |
| The Lord | provides light |
| The People | walk in the light |

This is active involvement with God in bringing about peace now, here and now! It plays into a strong Advent/Christmas idea that the kingdom has come, but not yet. Now, but not yet. The idea of something definitively begun (the kingdom) that will find ultimate fulfilment in a future time, but needs work right now.

1. **So what does this look like**

How does this joint venture work in practice?

God gives the vision, provides the teaching, inspires by his Spirit. We do the work in his power at work in us.

Take war and peace.

This vision is not the peace won by surrender, but by transformation:

‘swords transform into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks’

How might that look in Ukraine? It is not about the surrender of Ukraine to Russia, nor the capitulation and punishment of Russia, but rather a lasting peace born out of a desire for something transformational between these two people and nations.

This week in the New York Times a glimpse of how this might work was given:

**What Will Russia Without Putin Look Like? Maybe This.**

Nov. 21, 2022

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

**By Joy Neumeyer**

Ms. Neumeyer is a journalist and historian of Russia and Eastern Europe.

Russia’s current condition — militarized, isolated, corrupt, dominated by the security services and hemorrhaging talent as hundreds of thousands flee abroad to escape service in a horrific war — is bleak.

In hopes of an end to this grim reality, some wait expectantly for Vladimir Putin to leave office. To change the country, however, it is not enough for Mr. Putin to die or step down. Russia’s future leaders must dismantle and transform the structures over which he has presided for more than two decades. The challenge, to say the least, is daunting. But a group of politicians is devising a plan to meet it.

Composed of well-known opposition figures as well as younger representatives from local and regional governments, the [First Congress of People’s Deputies of Russia](https://www.newsweek.com/russian-revolutionaries-prepare-post-putin-future-1756688) met in Poland in early November. The location, Jablonna Palace outside Warsaw, was symbolic: It was the site of early negotiations in the round-table talks that led to the end of Communist rule in Poland. There, over three days of intense debate, participants [laid out proposals](https://rusdep.org/category/docs/approved_documents/) for rebuilding their country. Taken together, they amount to a serious effort to imagine Russia without Mr. Putin.

The first and most pressing priority, of course, is the invasion of Ukraine. Everyone at the congress opposes the war, which they assume will be lost or lead to nuclear disaster. To deal with the consequences and to prevent a repeat tragedy, they propose an “act on peace” that would demobilize the army and end the occupation of Ukrainian territory, including Crimea; create a joint group for the investigation of war crimes; pay reparations for damaged infrastructure and the families of the dead; and reject future “wars of conquest.” In addition to offering a deterrent to future expansionism, this wide-ranging pledge would provide an essential reckoning with Russia’s history of imperialist invasion.

The officials responsible for the devastation will need to be rooted out, too — something that never happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The congress [would bar](https://rusdep.org/proekt-akta-o-lyustracii/) from working in state and educational institutions those who belonged to “criminal” organizations — such as the Federal Security Services or state television channels — or publicly supported the war, as well as restricting their voting rights. It would also create a “[de-Putinization](https://rusdep.org/pervoocherednye-dekrety-novoj-vlasti/)” commission to consider the rehabilitation of certain groups, including those who publicly recant and did not commit especially serious crimes, and open the archives of the security services.

Then there’s the structure of Russia itself. The Russian Federation is highly centralized, with a patchwork of over 80 republics and regions that are strongly subordinate to the president, enabling the accumulation of enormous power. The congress, drawing on decentralized visions from around the time of the Soviet collapse, proposes to dissolve the Russian Federation and replace it with a new parliamentary democracy. According to a broadly worded draft provision on “[self-determination](https://rusdep.org/prinyato-sezdom-osnovopolagayushhaya-deklaraciya-sezda-narodnyx-deputatov/),” the future Russian state should be “joined on the basis of free choice by the peoples who populate it.”

This is a picture of transformation as God imagines it.

**Conclusion**

It is one thing to think about this in terms of far away Ukraine, but what about closer to home?

Where are the things that are causing pain and heartache in my life, my home, my family, our church, our city, our nation? And what is God calling us to act upon?

What are the weapons I wield that cause pain not peace in my home, family, city and land? How can I take those same weapons and transform them into instruments of peace?

I know that, at times, I have been guilty of holding onto expectations of others that expresses itself in conditional love -my approval will come when you meet my expectations. That is a dangerous and manipulative weapon to use on another. How might I allow that to be transformed into open-armed and unconditional love that will in turn allow others to feel deeply accepted for who they are – an empowering place of growth!

That is an adventure – unusual because we are too often simply stuck in our old dysfunctional habits, exciting because of the power in this for us to become better people, daring and risky because there is this element of handing our lives over to God, for Christ to be born in us and His Spirit to permeate and transform us!

God you and me

God you and us

In the big places of strife

In the smaller places of life

Let *us* walk in the light.