

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Consecration & Christ the King Sunday
Sunday, November 20, 2022
10 AM

Text: Isaiah 2:2-4 & Colossians 1:11-20 (NRSVUE)

[Prayer]

Last week I spent two days in a learning community hosted by the Parish Collective. The Parish Collective is a nonprofit that connects and empowers people to be the church in their neighborhoods. In historic Christianity, the parish was a local church and the neighborhood surrounding it. The congregation had deep roots in the neighborhood and relationships with the people living there, whether they were church members or not. In the parish God's mission is hyper-local: God is not at work elsewhere in the world; God is at work right next door, around the corner, and up the street in the everyday lives of our neighbors.

In their vision statement, the Parish Collective writes, "The church has become so divided, disembodied and displaced that it is nearly impossible for us to be a tangible sign of hope in the everyday life of our neighborhoods... [but] We believe that when we organize the church around God's dreams for our neighborhoods, there is nothing in the world that cannot be healed, transformed, and liberated."¹

I walked away from my experience with this question burning in my heart: Are we at Community UMC a tangible sign of hope in *our* neighborhood?

[pause]

John Wesley famously wrote, "The world is my parish." He wrote those words in his journal while enroute as a missionary to the colony of Georgia. Wesley was passionate about bearing the Gospel to people far away from his native England, particularly indigenous Americans. In the end, Wesley's mission in Georgia was a failure. But his missionary passion remained as he returned to England and took up itinerating on horseback from parish to parish, preaching outside the walls of

¹ <https://www.parishcollective.org/vision>

the church to whomever would listen. Today the movement he began is a worldwide church with more than 12 million members. Part of our heritage as United Methodists is a sense of mission that spans the globe. Our connectional system allows us to participate in acts of compassion and justice all around the world through denominational bodies like Global Ministries and UMCOR. We are a people who embraces the world as our parish.

Still, one of the instructors in my learning community provoked me to think more critically about the idea of the global parish. He quoted Wesley in his opening lesson: *The world is our parish*. “But is it really?” he asked. “I’m not so sure.” Matthew 28 commands us to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (v. 19), but where does discipling really begin? It begins in our homes and our neighborhoods and our places of work, where we know people and are known in return. This is our immediate mission field.

Truthfully, the world is *God’s* parish. Our Christian vocation is to help cultivate God’s dream in God’s parish. And what is God’s dream? God’s dream is shalom. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. But shalom is not a passive peace; it is a constructive peace. It is a peace that practices reconciliation, healing, wholeness – the restoration of creation back to the way God intended at the very beginning. This is the dream the prophet Isaiah was speaking of when he declared,

“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...For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴He 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.” (2:2-4)

This prophecy is traditionally read on the first Sunday in Advent; in fact, we will read it again next week. But we are also reading it today, on Christ the King Sunday, as a reminder of just what kind of king and kingdom we proclaim. The kingdom that Christ reigns over is the peaceable kingdom, a kingdom built on the practice of shalom – the practice of reconciling and healing and restoring our relationships with each other and with the earth. In this kingdom the weapons of violence are turned into tools for farming. In this kingdom the walls of hostility between neighbors are broken down and we work side by side to cultivate a new Eden. To claim the world as our parish is to claim God’s dream of shalom as *our* dream, too, and then share that dream locally with the people we do life with.

Sometimes, though, I am hesitant to share God’s dream with my neighbors. I am hesitant because I look around at the world and God’s dream feels so distant, even impossible. There is so much in our world, in our neighborhoods, that is broken – broken systems, broken institutions, broken relationships. Isaiah’s prophecy can look like a fantasy.

But when we are tempted to despair, we must remember Who it is that will raise that mountain high above the hills and gather the nations, Whose word it is that will go forth and instruct us in the way of peace. That work is God’s to do and God’s alone. *Our* work is to believe that God will one day do it. *Our* work is to hold on to the conviction that God is sovereign despite the brokenness. *Our* work is to live confidently in the hope that we have received in Jesus, the “Word [of God] who became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, The Message).

In Jesus’ birth, God’s dream of shalom briefly became a reality. In Jesus’ life and ministry, we get a taste of what it will be like to live in God’s kingdom. And in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we glimpse that kingdom’s power. Paul declares in his letter to the Colossians that Jesus has already rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into His kingdom, a kingdom of light and grace (v. 13). The Greek translation of the word ‘transfer’ literally means the spoils of battle. We were once citizens of the kingdom of darkness, pledging allegiance to the powers of sin and death. But Christ is greater than any power of darkness. Though we were enemies of God, Jesus has made peace with us through the cross. He did not use political or military power to conquer us, but instead sacrificed his own life to reconcile us to God and give us a new citizenship in the peaceable kingdom.

Remember what we declare in our baptismal vows – that we renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, repent of our sins, and confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And when we confess such, we confess our belief that there is no thing in heaven or earth greater than our God. Nothing exists outside the power and presence of God:

- Not the oppressive power of fear and violence.
- Not the demoralizing power of scarcity and poverty.
- Not the desiccating power of illness and death.

Just as Christ reconciled us to God, so Christ is also reconciling these powers to God. And as we share God’s dream of shalom with our neighbors, we share the hope of a day when fear will be transformed into love, violence into peace, poverty into abundance, illness into health and wholeness, and death into eternal life.

[pause]

Today we consecrate our estimated giving pledges to God. This offering is a statement that we believe in God’s dream of shalom and we want to be part of that dream. We want this church, Community UMC, to be a tangible sign of hope in our neighborhood. We want to be a *living* hope for our neighbors. Isaiah announces that there will come a time when the nations will stream to the mountain of the Lord. There will come a time when people will want to learn God’s ways and walk in God’s path. And he says that this will happen because God’s dream is being proclaimed by God’s people in word and action. This will happen because there are those who extend the hand of welcome and inclusion in the breaking of the bread and the waters of baptism. This will happen because there are hosts on the mountain of the Lord.

The King is coming. He is moving into our neighborhood. Christ’s sovereignty extends to all of creation. There is no power in our lives or our neighbors’ lives greater than the love of God. It may feel at times like the world outside these church doors is disintegrating into chaos. Or maybe it’s not the outside world, but the inside world – your personal life – that’s disintegrating.

But Paul tells us that God’s love is a love that holds all things together. It is a love that is holding us together. Though the earth will change and the mountains shake and the oceans roar and foam, we have the assurance that God is with us. This is what it means to proclaim the reign of Christ: to say with confidence God is with us.

We know this because we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have been saturated with the presence and power of God. And so, we orient our lives and the life of this faith community in a single direction: toward Christ and the hope he embodies. We acknowledge that, despite the suffering of this age, our hope is eternally fixed in Christ. Hope is the good news we are called to share.

Amen.