

Creating Space for Hope  
Isaiah 2:1-5  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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December 1, 2019

Well, friends, here we are. It is December 1<sup>st</sup>. And it is the first Sunday of Advent. I suspect I am not alone in wondering how in the world we got here already. I suspect I am not alone in marveling that it will soon be the year 2020, and maybe I'm also not the only one shocked by the fact that we don't all have flying cars in our garages!

But, before we get too overwhelmed with how fast time flies, let's pause. In fact, that is one of the gifts of the season of Advent. It is a season of expectation and preparation. It is a season, that in our world comes in the midst of busyness and pressures and stress, and that makes it a very important season, indeed! But in order for it make a difference, we need to engage it.

In light of that, this year during Advent we will be exploring together the theme "Creating Space..."

So first, let's think about what it means to create space. When do we create space? What are times when that phrase might be used?

Our schedules are full, there are many demands, but we decide that there are things that are important to us...family time, conversations with friends, self-care, sleep...and so we create space for those as we block off time in our calendars.

The headlines are too often depressing, the days are too short, some relationships that once had promise seem to be struggling, our work seems to be too much effort for too little reward. And yet, in the midst of this we choose to embrace possibility, we choose to believe that there is more to life than this list, we create space for something new to grow.

We do seasonal cleaning, we thin out the contents of our drawers and closets and cupboards and we create space, not just for more stuff, but we create space to breathe.

Artist Pedro Reyes knows that rates of gun violence are high but he refuses to believe guns have the last word. And so, by the thousands he has transformed guns into shovels which have been distributed around the country to plant trees. In his art, he is creating space for something new.<sup>1</sup>

As we journey through Advent we are going to talk about how we create space in our spiritual lives, in our inner worlds, in order that God and the priorities of God might dwell. And the reality is that this will sometimes mean altering our physical space, changing the way we use our time and resources, and opening up our emotional space as well. But our goal during these four weeks is to talk about how we create space for the priorities of Advent to dwell.

So, today we begin talking about creating space for hope. And we do that using a familiar passage from Isaiah, a passage we often hear this time of year.

The book of Isaiah begins with an oracle against Judah and Jerusalem, the southern kingdom which is still standing but is living in the shadow of the power and threat of Assyria. Judah, the nation that claimed God's favor but that hadn't always been faithful. And so, the prophet speaks a difficult word from God reminding them of their sin. But that wasn't all. The prophet also brought an invitation to the people to engage God, to enter into conversation, to work together to create a new reality.

It is in this context that we hear the verses Krista read this morning. "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."<sup>2</sup> And then Isaiah goes on and says,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.intelligentliving.co/mexican-artist-turns-1527-guns-shovels-plant-trees/>

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 2:1, NRSV.

“[God] 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.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, not only are the people called out for their bad behavior, not only are they invited to engage God, but these words paint a picture of a different world. They open up the possibility - in real terms - about what the world can look like, about how they can live and engage with others and with God in ways that are life giving.

These words create space for hope. They give the people a different vision than the one they are living out. They show them a world in which they can choose productivity over prestige, community over conflict, the heart of God over the priorities of the world.

And it is important that we read these words in context. After all, if we read them only as isolated verses, then it is easy to pretend they are a simple promise upon which the people of Israel and we today are called to wait. But, if we read them in context, then these verses aren't just a promise we wait on from God, but they are a reality that we are called to engage with God...they are a picture we are called to not only dream of but to help create.

And for that we must create space in our lives for hope.

Because we, too, live in a world where it is easy to get overwhelmed by the conflicts...where it is easy to feel like we have no choice but to compete and to take sides and to live from the priorities of money and power. And yet, God tells us something different.

God tells us that all peoples can stream together...that we can learn God's ways and walk in God's ways...that peace can be a reality over conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 2:4, NRSV.

But, Isaiah also reminds us that we must be engaged. This isn't a picture God paints of something that the divine will do alone, but it is a call to each of us to participate in the creation of this reality. And the fact that we are required to do something means that God has a deep desire to partner with us.

But, if we don't create intentional space for this, then it is unlikely to come about. After all, our headlines and many of our daily interactions are filled with hatred and conflict, with polarization becoming greater, with little effort to understand the other, and few moments where we really stop and ask where God is in the midst of our decisions and our choices and our plans.

So, here we are in Advent. And we are asked to push pause...to slow down...to be intentional that we might create real space not only for hope to germinate but real space and effort that our living might nurture it.

As my friend Teri said, "Hope is believing that there is something more and something better and that we each have a part in getting there. Hope is being sure that love can win out, even when it seems that love isn't present. Hope is grasping firmly to the unknown and letting it carry you through."<sup>4</sup>

This is what we are invited into.

Let us each create space for hope to dwell. Let us create space that hope will become a lived reality within us and around us. Let us create space that we might move forward with hope.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Teri Pittman, comment on my Facebook post from November 28, 2017.