

Today's sermon title, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" is the title of a book by Thomas Friedman – Foreign Affairs correspondent, author, commentator and columnist. This book gets its title from a pivotal anecdote in which Friedman describes the modern day clash of the human drive for prosperity and modernization against the pull of relationships and community.

He describes how he visited the Lexus luxury car factory outside Toyota City in Japan. When he visited this sleek, shiny factory, 66 humans and 310 robots were making 300 sedans a day. Then, while riding the bullet train back to Tokyo, he read an article about the latest furor between the Arabs and Israelis. He writes "It struck me then that the Lexus and the olive tree were actually pretty good symbols of this post-Cold War era: Half the world seemed to be emerging from the Cold War intent on building a better Lexus, dedicated to modernizing, streamlining and privatizing their economies in order to thrive in the system of globalization. And half the world- sometimes half the same country, sometimes half the same person - was still caught up in the fight over who owns the olive tree."

Friedman aims to help his reader understand this new system. He points out the tension between the globalization system and ancient forces of culture, geography, tradition, and community and he details the powerful backlash that globalization produces from those who feel brutalized by it, and offers suggestions as to what we all need to do to keep this system in balance. He points to the continual scramble for power and resources, leading to a sense of dislocation felt by many people and enmities that can explode in terrorism and threats, as symptoms of this struggle.

It has been interesting to hear from our son Jim in India where he has seen firsthand the huge disparity between those who are upwardly mobile aided by education and opportunity yet who live side by side with people who struggle to live, baking bricks in the sun or living in still untouchable enclaves.

And then we open Isaiah and read the words of 11:1-10. The wolf and the lamb will lie together? I don't think so. The Palestinian and Israeli? No way? The Jew and the Muslim? Nope. Peace between North and South Korea? Ain't going to happen.

Is ours to be an era of peace? Maybe it is easier to believe that global wars are now less likely than perhaps 20 years ago, but ethnic, religious and local skirmishes continue to take millions of lives – from Rwanda to Afghanistan; from Iraq to Burma; from India to Pakistan; from Darfur to Nigeria, and across the 39th parallel. It seems clear to most that Isaiah's vision doesn't seem real. Yet God asks us to embrace the Peaceable Kingdom anyway, to put our trust in the shoot from the stump of Jesse.

Today's Scripture lesson - this prophecy of Isaiah, came at a time when the dynasty of King David, the son of Jesse, had indeed been reduced to a mere stump. The people of Israel are cowering in fear of the powerful and terrorizing Assyrians. They are not sure what the future holds, they are fearful, ill-at-ease, news of each defeat leads to panic and turmoil, the enemy is at the gates, armed with WMD.

Then in the middle of this frightening and violent time, God speaks. Through the prophet God promises to launch a new political initiative, God promises to bring about a serenity so pervasive that it bypasses the genetic hard-wiring of nature itself, allowing the wolf and lamb to share their personal space without either temptation or intimidation, even our feisty little schnauzer, Chipper, will be peaceful!

Travelers Insurance has been running an ad with the tag line, "taking the scary out of life." The ad shows a watering hole at which are gathered all kinds of animals, predators and prey. We see a Lion and a zebra drinking water side by side, an ostrich is seen chasing a lion, Birds are sitting on a tree limb with a cheetah, Meer Kats sitting on top of a crocodile as the croc glides through the water. It is a great picture of the peaceable kingdom, but it will take more than some insurance to get us there.

The way to this new reality comes from a shoot - from a bud, a sprout, a young leaf. Not from a warrior king or a conquering army, but from a fragile sprout. We know this shoot to be Jesus the Christ, the one born as a vulnerable baby in a manger in Bethlehem, the city of David. He doesn't come to us at Bethlehem as a Messiah with unlimited military might, even though legions of angels are at his disposal. Rather than scorching the earth with firepower, these angels are instead singing on Christmas night, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward all." The tender shoot from the stump of Jesse is the Prince of Peace, one who has "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord". Thanks be to God that this is so because history tells us that any other messiah does not bring peace but an unholy mess.

In this world there are two kinds of power: One sort of power is obtained by threats of punishment. The other arises from acts of love. Not love in the sentimental sense but love as a practical, kingdom-building power. When Quakers broke the food blockade on Germany and Austria after World War I they were not motivated by emotional love toward individual Germans, but by a higher sense of what makes politics work. The evidence that they were correct comes some thirty years later when Quaker relief groups were the only groups allowed to rescue Jews inside Germany, even at the height of the war. Because they had not used threats of punishment but shared "acts of love," they made an impression on the mindset of people as dehumanized as the Nazis.

So, what kind of power are we hoping for in this season of Advent? Coercive power? Or compassionate power? We may not be able to bring the kingdom to the globe, but we might be able to bring it to our neighborhood. And as we act faithfully locally, the effects might be felt globally - such is the interconnected nature of our lives today. That's why compassionate power that we bring to our context can have a glocal (both global and local) impact. This glocal impact is made possible because the shoot from the stump of Jesse has appeared.

So, as we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace, are we doing whatever we can to bring a peaceable kingdom? Are we influencing each other through threats or fear, or through acts of love? Do we show concern for the poor and the oppressed of the earth? Do we speak the truth in love, especially to those who are hurting themselves and others? Do we call to account those in leadership, politics, business or religion who fail to live and speak the truth? Are we at all skeptical of some of the stories that bounce around the internet willing to believe just about anything bad if it concerns someone we don't care for?

And so we wait, and the world waits. And still nations make plans for war, rather than cooperation, still the young and the not so young are sent off to war. War no more, is a beautiful vision, and it will take full shape only when Jesus comes in all his glory. There's just not enough righteousness and faithfulness loose in the world, and not enough people who are committed to practicing love instead of punishment. But in the meantime, in this Advent season of preparation and in the days beyond, we can graft our lives to the shoot that has emerged from the stump of Jesse, and we pray for the peace of

Jesus Christ to fill us and transform us. So that "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid. When there shall be no more hurt in God's world."

What a glorious vision. For every one of us who has discovered firsthand what it means to "hurt or destroy," this prophecy stands before us as an object of anticipation and hope. How harmonious it will be when the nursing child plays on a viper's nest, when we refrain from using our words or our status or our devotion to God to wield power real or imagined over other people, when the boss who abuses workers changes his ways and asks for forgiveness, when the Arab and the Israeli go walking through Jerusalem together, when the threat of terror is removed from the world forever. When will we know war no more, when the root of Jesse will rule, when the peace of the Lord will cover the earth, when all people will know peace and justice as God's plan and gift to the world.

Until then, we can take this vision to heart, and let it change our hearts forever. Until then let us put less effort into whatever our "lexus" is and put more effort into sharing the olive tree and specifically the olive branch of peace. Our glocal olive branch might be the Joy gift we will offer next week or the extra gifts we will share with those supporting the needy in this season; it might be the prayer we offer for friend and for foe; it might be the decision to befriend someone who is different or a stranger to us. Our glocal olive branch might be that donation or offering or contribution we make to allow God's work to go forward; it might be to volunteer to work in the nursery or to teach Sunday School; it might be the gifts we donate to Hope House where we see long lines most days. Our glocal olive branch might be taking that step of reconciliation towards someone who shares or holds a grudge; it might be our concern for the poor and the refugee or the homeless. The "lexus" is all about us – the olive branch and indeed the olive tree is all about God, our faith, our life, our Lord, our Savior, the Hope and Desire of every nation whose coming we await and whose coming again we should expect. Amen.