

## (26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)

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November 18, 2018

Isaiah 1-2:5

**“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. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”**

As we head into the Thanksgiving Holiday week, I thought some words by author and Presbyterian minister, Fredrick Buechner, instead of Isaiah message about political corruption, greed, violence oppression and injustices would be more appropriate for Thanksgiving. As Buechner mentioned, nobody ever invited a prophet home for dinner because as spokesmen for God, they were the terror of kings, government officials and people like us. Who needs that at Thanksgiving?!

Buechner' message is more comforting and honest for us to reflect on. He writes:  
**“Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Be not afraid”**

As we are aware, there are many terrible things happening in our world today. Troubling, disturbing, and scary things from the daily news of mass shootings to the recent picture of students in Baraboo giving the Nazi salute to the rise of hate crimes in our communities to news out of the never-ending war in the Middle East to the raging wildfires in California that continue to claim more and more lives while destroying whole communities and lives. It is overwhelming, and frightening to think about!

If you are like me, you wish you could ignore it and find a place of safe sanctuary from so as to not to be afraid of what is happening in the world we live in, God's world.

In this season of “Thanksgiving” who us doesn't want to see the beauty in and around us, instead of all the darkness and hatred that feels as if it is swallowing up all the light and love that graces God's world.

Where do you see beauty in the midst of the darkness and terrible things happening today? Me? I take walks up Hidden Farm Road in McFarland with Shadow and Staci, and sometimes friends who also are walking their dog.

I try to get up there at least once a day to watch the sunrise over the old orchard meadow or the sunset over Lower Mud Lake and the Yahara River. If I am lucky, I will catch a glimpse of the deer grazing, an eagle soaring or an owl calling from a tree.

There is a bench in the small meadow, placed there by a young man as a part of his Eagle Scout project. It allows people, like myself, to sit for a moment, watching the sunset over Lower Mud Lake and reflecting on life, and enjoying the beauty of the moment. I have sat there with Shadow, even taken pictures of him at sunset. In those fleeting moments as the sun paints the sky vivid colors, I am grateful for this beautiful gift of God.

In the midst of all the tragic, horrific, terrifying news, news that is filled with much ugliness and hatred, where do you find beauty? Does it help you to be less anxious and afraid in this world?

Do you ever find comfort in the company of another person?

Another Presbyterian minister, who use to live in a neighborhood many of us loved to visit, Fred Rodgers once said: **“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”**

Fred Rodgers, if you were not aware, was like me, an ordained Presbyterian minister. A graduate of Pittsburgh Presbyterian Seminary, he was installed to the ministry position we know as “Mr. Rodger’s Neighborhood”.

His mother offered him wise words. Words we all need to be mindful of as we too face these scary, terrifying times. Look for the helpers, they can help us see the beauty and grace of God in times of darkness and crisis, when we cannot.

I thought of his words this week after dealing with yet another horrific mass shooting. I am thankful for the first responders who rush to the scene of these tragedies to help stop the flow of blood and hopefully prevent more death. I am grateful for the doctors in the emergency rooms who spend hours treating victims of gun violence, even when they are criticized for their healing ministry. As I am for all those who help in the medical field from researchers to nurses to CNAs to therapists.

And I am amazed and grateful to the thousands of “helpers” who are fighting the wildfires in California (one who when he was a young boy, use to live across the street from us in Monroe). In the same way, I am thankful for the thousands of others who are helping search the scorched communities for many more victims who are missing and may have died in the fires, and for those who are helping people begin to recover from them.

Who are the “helpers” you are thankful for? Do you see God in them?

Victor Hugo, writing in his classic novel, Les Miserables, said: **“To love another is to see the face of God”.**

I give thanks to God for the beauty in the many colorful, diverse faces of people who live across the globe and down the street, who are helping to feed the hungry in our schools and communities, helping refugees asylum seekers who are fleeing persecution and violence in their home countries, working to reunite immigrant children with their parents who migrated for much the same reason any person who has ever migrated to a new place might. They are seeking safety and a better life for their family.

I am grateful this morning for the witness of the faith leaders in Baraboo who are working with the school district and their congregations to address the issue of racism, as I am thankful for the educators in McFarland, Cambridge and other communities who have had the deal with these same concerns in their schools.

There is so much hatred and fear and ugliness in our world, it is sometimes easy to miss seeing the beauty of those who find the courage to stand up, speak out, and work towards healing and reconciliation in God’s world where we all live together.

In whom do you see the beauty and grace of God’s spirit working to bring healing, reconciliation and peace?

In this season of Thanksgiving, I really want to look for the beauty in our world and in others who are out there, daily facing the darkness, sharing just a bit of God’s light of love, showing us the path that Jesus invites us to walk. But I am still afraid. I am afraid to admit that I am scared and overwhelmed at times by all the rise of hatred, violence and injustices in our

communities and world. I am afraid to admit that at times I am angry at God for the injustices and hatred and broken family, even within my own family. And, oh man, is this hard to say, I am thankful that some of these tragedies have happen to others, and not to me or my family. And that fear, while honest, doesn't seem to be grateful.

And yet, if I am also honest, then I must admit I am grateful for those who help and for you. I could not go on in life, nor face the darkness alone without you, without others. We need each other in life. We need others too. We are all interconnected, all of us, all around the world. It is only when we become aware of this truth, that we can at last see the beauty that is all around us and within each of us - family, friends, strangers and even enemies.

**Fred Rodgers says: "When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed."**

In this season of Thanksgiving, wherever you find yourself, look for the beauty out there in the world in nature, in the faces of others who you sit across from, stand next waiting to check out after shopping for the perfect "Black Friday" deal or as you buy groceries, or see helping others at the border or around the world, and within yourself.

**Fredrick Buechner leaves us with this thought: "If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both with in ourselves and with in the world; we would know that the Kingdom of God is what we all of us hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for. The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it."**

This Thanksgiving as we head home for the holidays, may all of us be grateful for the God in whom all human beings live and move and have our being, for in God, we find our true home.

And that my brothers and sisters in Christ, is beautiful!

## **Building the Bridge Between the Prophets Micah & Isaiah**

Last week, we heard these famous words of the Prophet Micah in 6:8: "God has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does God require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

This week we hear from another Prophet, Isaiah.

Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries of each other in the 8th century. Micah was from the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah was from the northern kingdom of Israel. Both spoke out forcefully against the corruption, greed, violence, abuses and injustices of the kings and government officials, along with the religious leaders. Isaiah even confronts the average citizen.

Both spoke about the downfall of the two kingdoms and of the center of political power - Jerusalem.

Micah was considered one of the minor prophets, not because of his message, but because of the length of writing.

Isaiah, on the other hand, is considered a major prophet because of the length of the book that bears his name. Setting that aside, you could say that Isaiah is the most important of all the Hebrew prophets, the major of the majors!

The actual book of Isaiah is broken down into two parts. Chapters 1-39 is considered The Book of Judgement and Chapters 40-66 as The Book of Comfort.

Like Micah, Isaiah's message, while grave is filled with beautiful, descriptive, poetic metaphor and images that give rise to the promised day when there will be no more sorrow, suffering and death and God's gift of Shalom (peace) will reign forever and ever! A time when the people will beat their weapons into instruments of peace and healing, and the wolf will lie down with the lamb.

But before we get to that day, we have to deal with the gathering darkness of war, violence, destruction, corruption and injustices of the political leaders and the people.