

SERMON DELIVERED AT WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL

NOVEMBER 22, 1981

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

And he shall judge among the Nations, and shall rebuke many people: And 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 anymore." (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)

Significantly, these prophetic words are recorded in both the book of the Prophet Isaiah (2:4) and the book of the Prophet Micah (4:3).

Coming to this pulpit at this time with the world and our nation in such distress and turmoil, there are compelling needs to proclaim prophetic words and to pray that leaders and lawmakers of nation and world will hear and respond.

Those who have ears to hear, let them heed the words of the Prophets.

For Christians, our vocation from Him whom we proclaim to be the Prince of Peace, the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets (Mt. 5:17), is to be peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said our Lord Jesus preaching on the Mount (Mt. 5:9).

When I accepted the office, and duties, of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, I accepted the responsibility to be a spokesman of the Episcopal Church to the Nation and the World. Now from this place as Bishop, as a Christian, as an American citizen, as a human being, I call on the responsible members of our human community to become peacemakers. The call is to serve in the relief of human suffering, a call to the sharing of the good in life, a call to justice, mercy and peace.

I call on the leadership and citizenship of this nation to be aroused and moved both by the threat of world holocaust and the spirit of generous good will to offer and combine talents and resources to feed and nourish the people of the world in place of arming them. The development of our nation's capacity to supply food for the people can become our chief security and a major instrument for peace.

From this place such a message is appropriately proclaimed, this towered Cathedral set upon a hill for all to see in this Capitol City of the nation, a nation dedicated "to justice and freedom" for all; a nation of "United States" defined and constituted in documents, monuments and poetic verse to be "a haven of blessing and peace" for the poor, weak and oppressed, the refugee seeking a home.

This towered Cathedral is designated a "house of prayer for all people." It is sign and symbol of Christian faith, a landmark of the Gospel of love and reconciliation, a witness to the cause of justice and peace, an offering to the "Glory of God in the highest, and peace, good will to the dwellers on earth."

In his sermon on the "mount of reflection," a hillside at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, no higher than this Mt. St. Alban, the Lord Jesus said to those who would share his mission of reconciliation and peace: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." (Mt. 5:14)

On this day, which is the last Sunday before a new Advent season begins, the season of expectation and judgment, we share in a custom of this Cathedral, to honor the people and institutions of one of the fifty states of our national union. That this is Mississippi Day is of special meaning and joy for me, having previously served the Episcopal Church and Christian Mission for twelve and one-half years of my ministry as a Bishop in Mississippi.

Of all that is remarkable of persons, places, past events and potential which prompt expressions of appreciation and gratitude, in and of the State of Mississippi, in this day's call for peacemaking and compassion, I am especially thankful for those I've known and know in the State's life and history who have faithfully and courageously labored for justice and peace. They are many, and with those believers in justice, compassion and freedom in every other State in this Nation, a Union of States is maintained. With all the faults and shortcomings attributed to this country from within and without there lives a Spirit in this land to fulfill and free humanity. No narrow nationalism is that of the living Spirit, but wise and generous response to that reality: "To whom much is given of them much will be required." (Lk. 12:48)

For seventy-five years now this place has been and is a site of building and ministry to the Glory of God and the Mission of Jesus Christ, the just "prince of peace." For seventy-five years this Cathedral has both by symbol and by ministry served this nation in time of celebration and joy, in time of trouble and bereavement, witnessing and reminding all sorts and conditions of people of the "gifts of the Spirit."

Today is part of a special period of Commemoration and Thanksgiving for both the purpose and for all good accomplishments of and in this place during now three quarter of a century. Such times of Thanksgiving are also appropriate occasions for rededication to the mission this Cathedral is established to serve. Never has there been greater need for that mission: the mission of justice and reconciliation and peace. Today the threat of a global destruction is enflamed with every national or tribal or partisan clash of violence anywhere in the world.

The threat of destruction, separation of people from families and homes, being driven from homelands, lack of needed food, no means of earning or making a living, deprivation of trading resources, loss of human dignity, death of loved ones, hopelessness, destitution -- such add up to the causes of clash and conflict, revolution and anarchy, destruction and death, war and holocaust all around the world and in this nation. Desperate need, nearsighted

greed or distorted religious creed are ready subjects for tyranny's causes. These destructive forces are presently increasing around our shrinking planet earth.

Those who have ears, let them hear the call to be peacemakers. Why do we hesitate to respond?

In our human predicament, our sin-plagued condition we often suffer illusions. The Christian faith teaches us to seek the truth, test the spirits, and our theories and assumptions, lest we become captive or victim of illusion or delusion.

In both the first (beginning) book and in the last ("revealing") book of our holy library - the Bible - evil power is identified as Satan, the Devil, and fascinatingly described as the "most subtle of all creatures." This evil is enemy of the good truth. This evil is master of the substitute, the phony, patron of the con game, sponsor of the illusion, distorter of reason. Consider the phrase: "Arming for Peace," or the reasonableness of the goal of achieving national security by stimulating international capabilities of global destruction.

National security can be a reasonable achievable goal or an illusory, tyrannical and destructive idol.

Somehow summoning our best hopes for life, for a just society in a healthy and peaceful world, and summoning our best talents and technologies, we must clearly make our priority the nourishing and feeding of the earth's human community -- not developing the capabilities of destroying part or all of the world's population.

The people of the world need bread and the sources of good life -- not arms for destruction.

There are other illusions which are the source of our ills and compound our difficulties. We settle for the substitute of the rhetoric of noble intentions, protective morals, healthy practices, and evade the necessary and reasonable responsibilities of reality.

For example, our country claims a readiness to accept the dispossessed and oppressed, refugees of the world. There is much sincerity and compassion among our citizenry to support the claim. Yet wave after wave of people come and our provisions as a nation to receive, orient, locate and assimilate the variety of new citizens remain under-developed -- if not non-existent.

Or again we claim to be "a government of the people, by the people, for the people." Is this claim a reality or an illusion? A careful observer might conclude that in reality we are not a Nation, but an arena for groups of special and limited interest, that our government "of the people" is for the "special interest groups" and by the lobbyist.

Are "public servants" -- the servants of the people -- an illusion?

The leaders in government, big business, labor, the Churches, all bear obligation to struggle against the temptation of partisan and personal acquisitions which increase human suffering. Selfish gain is an illusion. And amid our illusions, there are ironies.

For example, since 1906 -- in seventy-five years -- \$40,000,000.00 has been expended in the construction of this Cathedral. That's a generous estimate and yet that amount would not pay the cost of one major new weapon for our national arsenal. Turn it around -- the cost of one atomic submarine, or just the \$250,000,000.00 budget overrun on the most recently launched submarine, the Ohio, would pay the complete construction cost of three Cathedrals and provide an additional endowment.

Planes may be usable for twenty-five years -- cathedrals, who knows?

And while reflecting on the cost and purposes of submarines -- There is irony when our government's long practice of honoring cities of the nation by bestowing their names upon naval vessels, inadvertently christens a new attack submarine: The Corpus Christi - The Body of Christ - a hospital ship perhaps -- but not a vessel of destruction. A responsible change is needed. The irony of images.

There is irony when nations can develop and pay for the skill and technology to explore outer space, place men on the moon, and fail to develop systems to feed the people of the earth -- even to provide adequate food for all in this nation. Our talents, energies, technologies and investments need a re-ordering of commitment for the support and development of life on earth.

There's irony in a government's policy which provides subsidy for a tobacco industry while requiring notice of the cancer-causing properties in the marketed tobacco products and out of the same tax funds provides large grants for research for a cancer cure.

Is that a vital or a vicious circle?

There is a bitter irony in a country where there are great numbers of jobs to be done, unlimited services needed, and millions of people unemployed because of the limits on and of their employability.

The prophets declare: "And He shall judge among the Nations, and shall rebuke many people."

The prophecy of judgment -- such is the nature of prophecy. "Prophecy" is both to "fore tell" and to "forth tell." It is more than "predicting" -- that is, announcing before an event occurs that it will come to pass at a certain time. Prophecy is not limited to some individuals with special psychic powers receiving advance notice from a hidden source. There is an irony in the human tendency to look more often for the "tipster" than to heed the prophet, who, after assessing the realities of the time, the facts about the forces in accordance with the laws of cause and effect, fore tells and forth tells the consequences. The truth of the prophet's prophecy depends directly upon his recognition, perception, and obedient response to the truth.

As reported earlier our adversary the devil is most determined to provide a substitute for the truth -- to prevent our recognition, response, and acceptance of the truth.

The true prophecy is a forth telling of the judgment of truth. Judgment is an evaluation of the true conditions, the circumstances, the responsibilities with a concluding decision. The God of the true prophet is the God of truth and justice, not a whimsical tyrant or vindictive punisher.

The clear foretelling of God's judgment is that we humans will have the consequences of our choices. God's evaluative judgment is already present among the nations. We are rebuked, warned, reminded, recalled to just and peaceful ways -- by the truth of God. If we fail or refuse to heed, the judgment is destruction and death.

The prophecy is clear and forth told. The judgment is fore told by prophets before the case is closed. How shall we plead? Our response to the prophetic truth will determine the judgment we experience.

The proclamation of God's judgment by the Biblical prophets always comes as or with a call, a vocation -- a call to turn, which is a call to repent, a call to respond, a call to live -- a call to a different way for living.

It takes no special seer to learn from the conditions of our present times the need for peacemaking -- for healing and feeding and enabling of human service -- the beating of swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks.

There is need for the offering of beneficial services by all sorts and conditions of people. Public servants, clergy, business leaders, labor leaders, farmers, professional people share a common vocation in addition to offering their particular services to benefit humanity. That common vocation is to help the helped to become helpers -- to help receivers to become offerers.

A task shared by Government and Church alike is enabling people to perform beneficial service where needed. Our spiritual ancestors believed that to secure peace a peace offering was required. This peace offering in today's world is the self-offering in service of citizens, peacemakers, service to make life better for all the people of the world.

People of this country have the capability of providing life resources -- for the world -- and the ability to deliver if given opportunity. The socialist countries have been unable to provide sufficient basic foods for their own people. Already we provide tons of needed grain.

There is in that reality ground for new and different negotiations -- and the conversations, proposals and exchange of ideas should proceed continuously until there is achievement.

Let us become known as the dependable source of food -- not arms. Let us demonstrate a commitment to nourish and develop the world -- not risk destroying it.

Such must be the goal and concerted effort of Christians and all people of good will. As disciples and servants of the Prince of Peace -- our calling is so to serve human need as to turn away wrath and enable fellow citizens of all races, colors, and creeds to become peacemakers.

To the President -- whose recent call for the reduction of missiles is applauded -- to the lawmakers and other public servants.

To the religious community and all of good will.

Dear Brothers and Sisters for the blessing and benefits to all of life in justice and peace.

We are being called to offer ourselves in service and sharing in more immediate and effective ways in order to provide a better life to all people of this nation and beyond to the whole world.

Review the plans, coordinate the leadership, enlist all allies, send out emissaries, organize our services to heal and feed and develop for peace.

Offer food to our adversaries and a challenge to compete in a peacemaking race.

And together we can beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks.