

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Our text are these verse from this morning’s first lesson:

The word of the LORD (shall go forth) from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He 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>5</sup> O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Today we begin the season of Advent. Advent is not just about getting ready for Christmas. It is not just about putting up lights and buying gifts. Advent calls us to think about how God keeps **breaking into our world and breaking into our lives**.

God can seem distant and remote and removed from our lives. So distant that many people live their lives with out giving God a thought. That is not God’s problem – that is our problem. The distance between us and God is there because of humanities rebellion. We ran away, not God.

And the fact that we ran away from God and distanced ourselves from him breaks God’s heart. But God does not turn his back on his prodigal creation: He keeps coming to us, keeps breaking into our world, keeps breaking into our lives.

2,000 years in the **past** God broke into human history with the birth of His son. At some point in the **future** Christ will break into human history again. And when Christ returns all will be restored to the way God wants it to be: death will be swallowed up forever, and we will live as Sons and Daughters of God – fully and perfectly.

But right **now**, Advent reminds us that God continues to break into our world. In Word, in Water, in Bread and Wine, God comes to us to break into our lives.

And God knows, we need it. I could point to a million things that cry out for God to break into our world, a million places where people are suffering, a million places where people are trying to cope with indignities & injustices, a million place where people grapple with tragic circumstances.

A 15 year old student dying in a car crash in suburban Virginia, an innocent youngster shot in a drug deal gone bad in Anacostia, a young woman dying in service to her country in Iraq – one is not more tragic than the other, all profoundly effect their loved ones.

This week a lot of people were particularly touched this week by death of Sean Taylor. 24 years old, a gifted athlete, shaking off some of his more youthful indiscretions and getting life on track. Murdered in his own home.

That deeply touched his teammates and coaches. And the pain was felt far beyond the sports world. Just about every place I went this week, people were talking about *this* tragedy.

Wednesday Michael Wilbon wrote in the Washington Post:

...Could Sean Taylor’s murder have been a random act, a break-in, something that happens every day in America, something that could happen to any one of us no matter how safe we think our neighborhood is? It could have been just

that. But would it surprise me if it was more than that, if there was a distinct reason Taylor was sleeping with a machete under his bed? ... Would it stun me if Taylor was specifically targeted? Not one bit.

You see, just because Taylor was changing his life, don't assume the people who pumped 15 bullets into his SUV a couple of years ago were in the process of changing theirs. Maybe it was them, maybe not. Maybe it was somebody else who had a beef with Taylor a year earlier, maybe not. Maybe it was retribution or envy or some volatile combination.

His words remind me of a sad fact of life in this country: we have created a culture that glorifies violence. ***Glorifies*** violence. To be sure, we humans have been violent ever since the Fall. In the Biblical story it took humans ***one*** generation to invent fratricide – Cain kills his brother Abel. One generation!

If you're a science fiction buff you may remember Stan. Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey". It took an evolutionary view of human origins. And what marks the birth of human race, Homo Sapiens? It is when one proto-human uses a "tool" to kill another. In Kubrick's mind ***murder*** marks the birth of the human race!

So violence is not suddenly new to us humans. Human history is the story of one bloody conflict after another. But we American's ***glorify*** violence. We sing its praises in much of the music our young people listen to. We bring the images right into our homes.

If you were an ancient Roman and wanted to see someone torn to shreds you had to get up off the couch and go to the Coliseum. (Were *children* allow to see the spectacles???) We bring the images right to the living room couch and, in too many homes, raise our children on violent images. And then feign shock as we see so much carnage in our homes and streets.

God knows, we need Him to break into this world!

The first candle on our Advent wreath is the Prophet's candle. Prophets are the people who in the darkest moments, in the midst of the worst situations, in the times of deepest despair, cry out "Listen ... listen! God is breaking into the world. God is coming to address this very thing that troubles us! Listen ... listen: *thus says the Lord!*"

I told you not too long ago about the cooking class Alice & I took where ever time my attention seemed to wander Roberto, our host/teacher would wave a wooden spoon under my nose and say "Fred – pay attention – this is important." That will forever be my image of the Prophet: "Pay attention ... listen ... this is important – God is breaking into our world – thus says the Lord!"

The first candle on the Advent wreath – the Prophets candle – cries out "Pay attention ... listen ... this is important – God is breaking into our world ... into our lives!"

This morning, it is the prophet Isaiah who cries out "Listen!": The Word of the LORD shall go forth from Jerusalem. He 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!

Notice that the “Word of the Lord” is called “He” not an “it”. “The Word of the Lord shall go forth from Jerusalem .. **He** shall judge.”

On the table in the Narthex you will find “Flames For The Faithful” devotional booklets. This is found in today’s devotion:

God has a lot to say to us. In fact, God has so much to say that it couldn’t be restricted to words or confined to paper. What God has to communicate is so important that finally God had to say it in person. The Word became flesh – a human being.

The prophet Isaiah cries out “Listen!: God is breaking into the world to bring **peace**. 2,000 years in the past God broke into human history with the birth of His son to make peace with a fallen humanity. Jesus took on our humanity and took all of our sin to the cross so that sin would die there. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we now have peace with God.

At some point in the future Christ will break into human history again, and establish the “Peaceful Kingdom”: Lion will lay down with the lamb, swords will be beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and we shall no longer make war on one another.

And right now Christ wants to break into our lives to bring peace to our hearts and our homes and our streets. “Come to me,” Jesus cries, “come to me with all your sins and burdens and hurts, and I will be your Peace.”

Having made peace between us and God, Christ calls His followers to be peacemakers and says blessed are the peacemakers – your efforts to bring God’s peace to a troubled world will identify you as children of God.

In our staff prayers last Friday we heard once again the familiar prayer of St. Francis: “Lord, make us instruments of your peace.” It’s a wonderful prescription for peacemakers:

where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
 where there is injury, let us sow pardon;  
 where there is discord; let us sow union;  
 where there is doubt; let us sow faith;  
 where there is despair; let us sow hope;  
 where there is darkness, let us sow light;  
 where there is sadness, let us sow joy.

**And**, in these troubled times:

where our children’s eyes and ears are filled with violent images,  
 let us turn off the T.V.s and the C.D.s’;  
 where young men and women are cast out to fend for themselves on mean streets,  
 let us invest time and energy in them to create hope;  
 where people are told again and again and again by parents and schools and  
 authorities that they are not important,  
 let us show them that they, too, are God’s precious children.

As followers of the Prince of Peace, let us work to the end the cycles of violence that would cause four young men to murder another young man in his home over *stuff*.

Listen! Listen! – this is important – in the name of him who is the Prince of Peace, we must to end the violence.

In Jesus name.