PROPER 28, PENTECOST 23, YEAR C, NOVEMBER 16, 2025

Gloom, doom and destruction appears in our Gospel lesson today. Unfortunately, it is all too reminiscent of our present world conditions and it's enough to make anyone want to run for cover and hide and never come out.

Now the gospel lesson is paired with the lesson from Isaiah which is really all about hope and life. It's the promise of a new life that is an alternative to a life of turmoil and chaos. Imagine a world, says the prophet, where everything connects, like a puzzle where all the pieces fit. Isaiah paints a vivid picture where heaven and earth are one. Where there is no more weeping or distress and life will never be cut short. People will live out the full length of their days and there will be continuity between human dreams and their fulfillment. He continues to say that families will build houses and live in them. Farmers will plant vineyards and taste the wine. Every worker will enjoy their daily labor, and every soul will be thoroughly alive. That's the picture Isaiah is painting.

At the center is an astonishing vision of peace: predators do not consume their prey and the prey doesn't hide or run away. The wolf and lamb coexist. The ravenous lion has become a vegetarian and steps up to the feed bin next to the ox. Imagine this, says the prophet Isaiah. Imagine a life where everything fits together.

This is the dream that God implants in the imagination of the prophet Isaiah. This is the dream that is waiting to be rediscovered by every generation that is to be lived with fresh energy. It is a powerful dream, because it is an alternative to most of the stories that we hear everyday and that actually appear in the Bible. Most of the stories in the Bible are about human failure – how we steal, kill, manipulate and worship power over God. The Bible offers honest observations about the failings of humanity to show, all to often, how we live in a world where good work is met with resistance and the innocent are victimized.

And we are reminded of the recurring problem with the human race which is: God implants within us a dream of peace, yet we keep choosing something less than the dream. We don't need to blame anybody else for this because we are the ones who choose. Every day some people are demeaned as something less than the image of God that they bear. The weak are plundered, often to increase the profits of the wealthy. Those who are deemed different are dismissed. And everybody is shouting over one another. And it's all a result of our choices.

This is why the Bible is so gut wrenching honest for it tells the truth about the reality of humanity. The Bible also speaks the truth about God. God is patient and abounding with steadfast love." And every day, we have the opportunity to live out the dream that God has for us. But time and time again we fall extremely short of who and what we are called to be.

The truth is we have forgotten what God's peace is and it begins with finding God's peace within ourselves. The Hebrew Bible calls it "shalom." Shalom is the balance between all the forces of life. Shalom holds the continuity between past and present. Shalom is a life lived without aggression or inflicting damage. It's about welcoming one another as neighbors, and not competitors. This is God's dream that we live in harmony with everybody we meet and it is given to us.

Last Sunday I attended a Jewish wedding. If you've ever attended one you know the wedding ceremony takes place under a Chuppah. The chuppah is a canopy that

represents the home the couple is creating and the importance of community. Its four open sides are symbolic of God's presence and blessing blowing through the home and the hospitality their ancestors Abraham and Sarah showed while the absence of chairs under the canopy signifies that people are more important than possessions.

During the ceremony seven blessings are read for the seven days of creation and they symbolize love, a loving home, humor and play, wisdom, health, art, beauty and creativity and community. The last blessing prays for a community that the couple will always be blessed with but also be blessed with the awareness that they are an essential part of a circle of family and friends. In fact the parents and other siblings are under the chuppah during the ceremony and other family members participate and circle the couple in reciting the blessings. This simple ceremony characterizes everything that God desires and requires of us; to be in community with each other surrounded by God's blessings.

If we look at the Gospel we understand that Jesus' words remind us of our call to a life of endurance, patience and faith in the midst of a world that is often difficult, confusing, and conflicted. We are called to a faith that looks above and beyond our personal circumstances to the promise of God here and now. Our Gospel lesson is a call to faithful living, to endurance, to hanging in through tough times, to having faith in the God who has faith in us. It's about building our life into a house for God instead of relying on things that eventually disappear.

Basically, it comes down to the fact that we are the bearers of God's good news. But more importantly we are the ones to whom God looks to do justice and mercy. We are the bearers of the power and presence of God. The headlines are not signs of the future, but signs that it is time for you and me to invest in our faith, our faithfulness, to keep living in difficult times with a trust in God in doing God's work of shalom.

If you remember the song Imagine by John Lennon he wrote of a world as Isaiah saw it: a globe without borders, a world without greed or aggression, a community of living beings dwelling together in peace. In Central Park right across the street from where he was murdered there is a mosaic that bears one word in the middle – imagine. It is an invitation for everyone to contemplate what it means to imagine all the things he wrote about in the song but it is also a holy invitation.

It is a holy invitation to live the dream that God has for us all. That we live as generously and graciously as Jesus. That we set a high standard of how to respect one another, serve one another, and love one another. It's not enough to have the dream; it must also manifest itself in what we do with our lives.

The first Christians forged the church by living like Jesus as best they could. They lived the Isaiah 65 dream so much so that people outside their circle were drawn inside it. They caught a glimpse of how all of us can take part in God's shalom. Even the fiercest critics looked at the church and said, "See how much they love one another."

In many ways the church has forgotten what that means. We are to be an open tent – a chuppah – where God's presence can blow in and around us on all sides stirring us to love one another and to build community where God is central and everyone is welcomed. It all starts with small, steady steps that benefit the lives of others, like taking a meal to the woman who just came home from surgery. Or introducing ourselves to the neighbors whose names we do not know. Or reading a story to a child.

Shalom always begins by offering an act of kindness. It's like the man who was working his way down the street with his snowblower blowing the sidewalks of all the

neighbors. Somebody asked, “Why are you doing this?” He replied, “It’s my small way of offering some goodness and blessing.” Imagine that. Imagine shalom.

Let us ask our loving God, to not allow us to be so consumed by the aggressions of this world that we cease to see what God imagines for all of us. Let us ask God to continuously implant within us a vision of God’s peace and well-being. And make that vision so attractive, enticing, and beautiful that we will work for it all the days of our lives. *Amen.*