

The Week of 2 Lent 2003
"Words in Time of War"
The Rev. Thomas W Simmons IV

We gather tonight because there is a war. We gather to address the issues related to the war within the context of our faith, to address them with the perspective given us in Holy Scripture. Each one addresses it differently.

Our Old Testament passage this evening offers us a vision of the future.

"In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains...Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob." He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away. 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."

This vision is of a world changed, a world in which God's "will is done on earth as it is in heaven." This is a world in which God's kingdom has fully come and his work is done. The worship of God is universal and the nations of the earth wait for his teaching. The Lord will rule and the nations will be able to live in peace.

Weapons of war are no longer needed. They will be transformed into farm implements so human beings can get on with the work of peace - forever. This is a biblical view of the future and it is what Christians hope, pray and work for.

Are we there yet?

No we are not. I guess that's obvious tonight. Though Micah's poetic words of beating swords into plowshares adorns the entrance of the United Nations building in New York, that institution and all the others who work for peace have fallen short of our goal.

We live in a world that is HEAVILY armed. Evil people and evil regimes bear arms with which they oppress, murder, assault, appropriate, blackmail, do violence and prey on the weak.

So the time of beating swords into plowshares has not yet come. We yearn in our hearts for it. We pray and work for it in the arenas of our lives and communities and nation.

But short of the full manifestation and victory of the Kingdom of God there comes a time when it is necessary to take up the sword and oppose such people and defend the innocent and weak. That's what Paul is saying in Romans 13.

He describes how God has “instituted” the “governing authorities.” He calls them “servants of God to execute wrath on the evildoer.” Because of this, Paul says, “he does not bear the sword in vain.”

Paul is telling us that until the time comes when all nations beat their swords into plowshares, God has put the sword in the hand of upright governing authorities to defend the innocent against evil aggressors and to punish wrongdoers. Paul says, “if you do what is wrong *you should be afraid*, for the authorities do not bear the sword in vain.”

The governments of the English-speaking world are convinced that it is their responsibility at this time to bear the sword in order to disarm a dangerous tyrant, to protect their own people and to liberate the oppressed people of Iraq.

It is a course of action fraught with risk, uncertainty and controversy. For this we need to pray. We pray for our leaders, for wisdom, humility and restraint on the part of our leaders as they wield the deadly force of our nation.

We pray for our military for their strength and safety as they step into harm’s way on our behalf. And we pray for their restraint and care as they unsheathe weapons that kill and destroy.

We pray for the innocents caught up in this terrible struggle. And we pray for our enemies that they might turn and be saved, that they might experience all the good that God intends for them. May God help them.

In the midst of it all we pray for the swift conclusion of hostility and destruction and the growth of peace in it’s aftermath, that God will guide the uncertain course of what is to follow. May his will be done on earth as it is in heaven and may he bring peace once again to this troubled part of the world. AMEN