

God's Promised Day  
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November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5

This passage reminds me of the standard advice given to fiction writers:  
show, don't tell.

It means don't tell the reader that Agnes is angry.

Show that she is angry by the way her spine straightens, her nostrils flare,  
her hands clench, or her voice shakes.

Don't just tell the reader that Andrew is missing his wife.

Show him looking at her empty chair,  
or poking the frozen dinner meatloaf so unlike his wife's.

Show, don't tell.

I was reminded of this advice because of the first line of the passage from Isaiah 2:

This is "the word that Isaiah saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."

How do you see a word?

Usually the Bible says "The word of the Lord came to so-and-so, saying..."

But Isaiah sees a word, which means that God's word came in the form of a vision,  
a vision of what could be.

We are in only the 2nd chapter of Isaiah, but the 1st chapter has been pretty clear  
about the trouble the people are experiencing.

The country lies desolate; the cities are burning;  
and foreign forces are devouring the land.

But Isaiah's criticism is not for the invaders, but for the people of Judah.

Isaiah says that they are a sinful nation,  
a people laden with iniquity.

And God says "I've had enough of your meaningless sacrifices.

You're supposed to be seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed,  
defending the orphan, and pleading for the widow.

Instead you come to me with blood on your hands  
and I'm sick of your excuses."

But chapter 2 has a very different tone, with a vision of a very different world.

In this world all people will be drawn to God, to learn of God's ways.

God will bring justice between the nations, and justice will bring peace.  
So they will have no need for weapons.

They will not need to study the tactics of war.  
The sword will no longer be used to pierce flesh  
but will become the cutting blade of a plow.  
And the spear will no longer slice people  
but prune bushes to help them yield more fruit.

The vision might have stopped with the destruction of the weapons,  
“shattered to bits, robbed of the power to destroy.

But it doesn't....

It is a vision of transformed and transforming capacity .

Like swords and spears, plowshares and pruning hooks are tools  
made with human craft from the minerals of the earth and the growth of trees.

The ingenuity and skill that devised weapons of war  
also devised tools and technologies

to cultivate rocky soil, to build terraces,

and coax forth from the land the nourishment of olive, fig, grain, and grape.

Isaiah sees in this same creativity the capacity to transform the machinery  
of warfare into a technology whose sole purpose is to sustain the life  
of families in God's good land.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a vision that says “I'm going to take all the creativity and ingenuity  
that was used to make weapons, and I'm going to transform it  
so that your creative energy is used to sustain life rather than take it.”

This was the word of God that Isaiah saw:

a vision of a world at peace, a world with no need for weapons,  
no need for war.

What a wonderful vision.

The problem, of course, is that it hasn't come true—  
certainly not in Israel and not at home either.

We continue to make weapons at mind-boggling rates.

In the U.S. there are now more guns than people.

“There are more than 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States,  
or enough for every man, woman and child to own one

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<sup>1</sup> Portier-Young, Anthea. “Commentary on Isaiah 2:1-5” workingpreacher.org

and still have 67 million guns left over.”<sup>2</sup>  
 That’s 120 guns for every 100 Americans.  
 Yet 41 million Americans face hunger on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup>  
 We need some swords turned into plowshares.

What are we to make of Isaiah’s vision, given the realities we face?  
 Will it ever come true, here on earth?

Will it only be true in some after life?

Was it only a dream?

How are we to believe this promise that all people will come to God,  
 when we see the declining role of the church in America?  
 How are we to believe this promise that God will bring justice to the nations,  
 when we don’t even have justice within our own cities?  
 How are we to believe that God will turn swords into plowshares,  
 when we can’t stop the battleground of our own family dinner table?  
 Isaiah’s vision? To use the slang insult from my youth: dream on!

The season of Advent is a season of waiting—  
 waiting for the coming of the Christ Child yet again into our world.

But idle waiting is not what God wants of us.

We don’t just sit around waiting for a reason to hope.

We can’t just say “Dream on!” to Isaiah, and then sit back and wait.

That IS the point. The point is to dream on.

God’s promised day can’t wait because hope can’t wait.

What we are called to do, as people of faith, is to work for God and with God  
 to create the world that this vision foretells.

Can you see it? Can you see the word of the Lord?

Can you see a world where men share their power?

where they are free to express their emotions without ridicule?

Can you see a world where women are safe?

where they are free to explore their potential without limit?

Can you see a world where transgender and non-binary people

can be their true, authentic selves without risk?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/new-data>

Can you see a world where Christians, Jews, and Muslims walk side by side,  
and protect one another's right to worship?

Can you see a world where black mothers and fathers do not have to warn  
their black children about racism and bigotry,  
and police violence?

Can you see a world where six-year-old children do not have active shooter drills  
and no one goes hungry and everyone gets the help they need to live?

Can you see this world?

I've been doing some reading recently on a condition called aphantasia,  
which is the inability to voluntarily create visual images in one's mind.

Apparently some people can create in their mind's eye  
detailed images of loved ones or memories or even imagined futures.

Others lack the ability to visualize.

They only know they are thinking about someone or something—  
they can't actually see it.

A popular test going around social media goes like this.

I invite you to close your eyes and imagine an apple.

What do you see?

Do you see an actual apple?

What color is it?

Does it have a stem or dew or a bruise?

Or do you see just a gray apple-shaped blob?

Or do you see nothing at all?

(You can open your eyes now.)

I don't know for sure if I have aphantasia, but I definitely am a poor visualizer.

I can bring people and scenes to mind,

but I can't actually see them.

I wonder sometimes if we have spiritual aphantasia,  
if we lack the ability to envision a different world,

and if our lack of vision limits our ability to create that world.

God created us as co-creators, but we have to envision it before we can create it.

Prophets are those with vision.

Prophets are those who have hyperphantasia—the ability to see in great detail.

Isaiah had spiritual hyperphantasia.

Fortunately, the ability didn't die 2500 years ago.  
 Back in 2007, as part of a campaign to curb shootings,  
     a city in Mexico collected guns to get them off the streets.  
         They collected 1,527 guns.  
 Artist Pedro Reyes took those 1,527 guns and melted them down  
 and turned them into 1,527 shovels.  
     Those 1,527 shovels planted 1,527 trees.  
         Can you see the trees, blowing in the breeze?

Reyes' next project came about because  
 a government agency in Mexico gave him 6,700 guns  
     that had been confiscated from criminal gangs and rendered inoperable.  
 He began turning them into musical instruments . . .  
     electric guitars, violins, flutes and percussion instruments.  
 University of South Florida students played some of Reyes' instruments in concert.  
     A small tenor saxophone made out of the barrel of a gun.  
     Steel guitars fashioned from 9 mm semiautomatic handguns.  
     A bass, whose neck is made from a double-barreled shotgun.  
     Curved magazines from AK-47 assault rifles form the body  
         of the bass guitar.<sup>4</sup>  
 From the horror of gang violence comes music.  
     Can you see the instruments? Can you hear the music?

In the words of Rev. Kenneth Samuel, in a UCC devotional this week,  
 "We are often pretty clear about the realities we seek to bring into being.  
 But are we as clear about what must be diligently resisted  
     before that which is desired is manifested?"  
 To turn our swords into plow shares, we have to be able to give up the swords.  
     To create the musical instruments, we have to be able to give up the guns.  
         To bring equality to Northfield,  
         we have to be willing to share our privilege.  
 God's Promised Day isn't here yet.  
 We are not at peace. But we are not without hope.  
 If there is anything the Christmas story teaches us, it is hope.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/25/265794611/artist-transforms-guns-to-make-music-literally>

Remember how Isaiah saw the word of the Lord?

The Gospel of John knows all about that Word.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Isaiah’s vision was the word of God.

Jesus was the word of God.

And maybe—just maybe—we can be the word of God, too.

A word of hope.

The hope for which our world waits.