

Sermon Transcript

Border Buddies

Isaiah 2:1-5 and Matthew 24:36-44 | First Sunday of Advent | November 30, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

When I was 25, I went to a Gophers-Badgers football game back in the Metrodome. One of the greatest rivalry games in college football, the winner gets to claim Paul Bunyan's ax (**AX slide**).

In this particular matchup, the Gophers had certain victory. All they had to do was punt the ball away and the game was over.

But, with 30 seconds left, the punt was blocked and returned by Wisconsin for the winning touchdown. The axe returned to Wisconsin.

On the walk away from the stadium, Badger fans, still in disbelief at their incredible fortune, taunted Gopher fans. I even witnessed one Gopher fan slap a Badger heckler. It wasn't pretty.

This wasn't a friendly rivalry. This was a border battle.

Twenty years later, I went to my second Gophers-Badgers football game. This time, I went with a mixed group (**SLIDE of Badgers and Gophers**). In a snowstorm (**SLIDE of family**).

The outcome was a little bit different—this time, the Gophers prevailed (**SLIDE of winning the axe**).

But there was something else different.

I noticed the way that the fans treated each other in the stands. There were a lot of Badgers in the stands and the interaction between the two fanbases was much friendlier than 20 years ago. There were fewer Border Battles and more Border Buddies.

Was it true? To borrow a phrase from today's Isaiah reading, have the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin finally beaten their swords—or axes—into plowshares???? Have we found peace? I guess there are still the Vikings and Packers (**Dueling Favre's**). Maybe we're not quite there yet.

Certainly when Isaiah was written, roughly 750 years before Jesus was born (**SLIDE of Isaiah**), the swords to plowshares metaphor had no concept of football, or any sport for that matter.

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It was all about the gruesome toll of war and conquering empires.

Isaiah is actually written in three separate chunks, by different writers, over the span of hundreds of years.

The part that we just read was written by the original Isaiah, son of Amoz, and he wrote his section, in poetic verse, well before the Babylonian conquest and the time of exile that much of the Old Testament was written.

But it was during the Assyrian conquest that Isaiah first writes about God's judgment against the economic, social, and religious issues of the day—that the people have turned from God and they are about to endure the punishment for their behaviors.

So Isaiah calls the people to turn to the LORD—in fact, go up the mountain and to be taught and follow in the path of the LORD.

What does Isaiah expect the people to learn when they go to receive this message?

The LORD will judge the nations and instead of using swords to slay one another, they'll convert these weapons into instruments of plowing the land and pruning the branches.

Isaiah confidently says, "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; nor learn war anymore."

It's like he's telling them: Do you believe this is possible? Are you with me? Is this the world you want???? Then come on, house of Jacob—remember, Jacob is Israel—come on Israel, we have something important to do. **(SLIDE of Light on mountain)** In a world of darkness and despair, let's walk in the light of the LORD!!!

Sign me up! I'm in. It certainly isn't that simple, is it?

Walter Brueggemann, the famous Old Testament scholar, wrote that reading Isaiah provides a historical reality that is strikingly similar to the current condition of Western culture. Brueggemann didn't write this in the last year, mind you—he died this past June at the age of 92.

He wrote this in 1998. Which goes to show how timely it is. He wrote (SLIDE WB), **"like the book of Isaiah, people are engaged in a struggle for the future. Our own time and place, as it turns out, is much like THAT time and place."**

Isaiah, when it comes to this passage, has a particular message to share with us today.

Norman Gottwald suggests that "the image of the poem is something like an effective United Nations, where the nations can come in concert, drawn by a shared offer of well-

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being, where war will be unnecessary and no longer an available practice of the nations.”

Brueggemann adds, “nations will not need to defend against each other because God will establish peace through which all will be safe and prosperous.”

It is a hopeful message: there will be an end to hateful, divisive ideology. The nations will learn peace... AND practice it!

This doesn’t feel possible, yet there have been significant epiphanies—inspired by Isaiah.

This sculpture is in New York (**SLIDE of sculpture**) at the United Nations Rose Garden—where it was gifted in 1959 from the Soviet Union.

It was created by a Soviet artist, just think of all the conflict they’ve been through!—The piece is called “let us beat swords into plowshares”. In the decade after World War II.

In Japan, the Tokyo Tower, completed in 1958 (**SLIDE of Tokyo Tower**) was inspired by the Eiffel Tower. The second-tallest tower in Japan, a third of the steel was obtained by recycling US tanks damaged in battle during the Korean War.

They literally beat instruments of war into a reminder of peace—the tower symbolizing the post-war recovery of the nation.

And what about politicians? Certainly some have used Isaiah’s words to promote peace? What about here in the United States?

Guess which president directly quoted Isaiah:

Cannot swords be turned to plowshares? Can we and all nations not live in peace? In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences world-wide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask you, is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien than war and the threat of war?

Would you believe it’s Ronald Reagan (**SLIDE**)... who said this in an address to the UN in 1987.

Not everyone believed Reagan—including Eagles’ drummer and singer, Don Henley, who wrote a song called the “End of the Innocence” which was critical of this speech as he saw our country moving away from peace and innocence into a time of war—including

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the lyric “they’re beating plows into swords.” Since then, the United States has been involved in many wars throughout the globe.

And of course, if we want to remember the most optimistic rendition of Isaiah in contemporary culture, Michael Jackson’s “Heal the World” is iconic.

Create a world with no fear Together we'll cry happy tears See the nations turn Their swords into plowshares

This is the first Sunday of the church year—it’s a month until the day we celebrate the birth of a savior. And this is paired with an apocalyptic passage of Jesus right before his crucifixion.

Did the arrival of Jesus cause the world to turn their swords into plowshares? Far from it. By promoting a message of loving our enemies, he became a threat to be killed. When he’s arrested, he tells his friend, Peter, to put his sword away. He’s not here for battle.

Perhaps our takeaway is more personal. Many of us wear a cross around our necks (**NECK**). We make the sign of the cross at the beginning and end of worship as a reminder of whose we are and who sends us out into the world.

We’ve taken this symbol of violence, death, and destruction... and we’ve turned it into a symbol of hope and peace.

The birth of a savior is coming. Peace is not upon us. But we don’t rest and hope for it to go away. We have a voice. When we see injustice, our faith compels us to respond.

Isaiah has something to say about our lives today. We love power and prosperity. That is not the goal. That’s not the meaning of this life. Instead, in order to walk in the light of the LORD (**SLIDE of sanctuary**)... put down our swords, our axes, and our words of hate and greed. God’s calling us to shine a better light into the world. Amen.