

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, 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!

Isaiah 2: 1-5

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Matthew 24: 40-44

An Opening to the Light: Vulnerable to Peace

My sister doesn't want to come to the party. I have pushed her—too hard, probably—so that she has told me I am insensitive—that I don't understand her pain. It isn't that—at least, I don't

think so; I just want her to be open to the possibilities. Maybe I also want things to be the way they were. The way I always imagined they were.

We have our own house now, and live close enough that, once again, we can host the family Christmas gathering. After our parents died, my sisters and brothers and our families started the tradition of gathering at our house to celebrate Christmas together; this year, it will be our house once again.

And I want them all to come, both sisters, both brothers, their children and mine, grandchildren and, even, a couple of great-grandchildren. But my sister doesn't want to come because she is hurt. She

doesn't want to come because she has been hurt.

She doesn't want to come because she is afraid of being hurt again—left out by the others, excluded from the fun, feeling unloved and unwanted. I have pushed her to come, probably too hard, and she says I am insensitive to her pain.

It is easier to ask someone else to let down a wall, to ease her defenses, to risk being hurt—to become vulnerable—than it is to do it ourselves. But there will be a day. This is the word of the Lord, seen—seen, according to the Scripture—by the Prophet Isaiah. There will be a day. Sometimes, the bravest thing you can do is to just go home.

And, sometimes, the bravest thing is to open the door for someone else who has come home.

Pray with me, won't you?

Help us, God, this day to see ourselves as You see us. Help us to see ourselves as we truly are. Be gentle with us, for many of us are like me, God, and may not like what we are made to see. For many of us, the sight of our own lives as You see us might be a shock; let it be so but then, God, reveal Yourself to us. Reveal Your love for us just as we are, even as You call us to be changed. Give us peace in the heart of the storm of our lives. And remind us that in all that we see and hear—even if we do not like

it—and in all that we say and do—even if it is new and unfamiliar—the glory of this time and of these words is Yours, alone. Amen.

In the movie Home Alone—some think of it as a Christmas classic—young Kevin, 8-years-old—is accidentally left behind—inadvertently home, alone—as his family leaves for a Christmas-in-Paris adventure. Eight-years-old, Kevin, a handful of a little boy, overhears two cat-burglars—the notorious “Wet Bandits”—casing his house and announcing that they will be back at 9:00 to rob the place. So Kevin gets ready, and a great slapstick comedy is put in place as the bandits arrive just in time to fall,

repeatedly, on ice Kevin has created on the steps, to be shocked by electricity Kevin has wired to a doorknob, to be burned by a **blowtorch Kevin** has set to fire up, to be hit by swinging paint cans and to walk, barefoot, across broken glass and nails Kevin has scattered on the stairs and floors. It's hilarious comedy—no lives are lost and the bandits are remarkably unscathed by the attack—so funny you hardly have a moment to wonder why, when he heard the plan for the burglary, Kevin didn't just call the police.

Jesus tells us it would be like that. Doesn't He? If you knew when the thief is **coming**, you'd stay

awake, ready, prepared to thwart the robbery. But you don't know; you can't be so acutely prepared. If you were, it would likely be your own hair singed off by the blowtorch, you falling down the icy front steps, you picking the glass out of your bare feet. You can't be on alert all of the time; that's not what "alert" means. So, instead, be ready. Maybe, in the modern world—if you are Kevin—you buy better locks, or install motion-sensing lights, or teach your children to dial 9-1-1. But don't run 220 volts through the front doorknob.

The problem is, we've been hurt before, haven't we? Robbed—if not of our possessions, of our joy.

Robbed of our **good feelings**, of our sense of security, our innocence, our self-respect. Robbed of our trust in one another and robbed of our belief that we are good enough, just as we are. So we build walls. We prepare defenses. We become isolated, unwilling to take chances, refusing to be vulnerable. We arm ourselves against the ones—even the well-meaning ones—who would intrude into our lives. We create concealed weapons of insults we might hurl in an emergency, hold tight to the nuclear codes of the harshest, most hurtful words we could ever speak to our loved ones, keep in reserve the threat of abandonment—of just going away and never coming

back. All so that we might never be hurt again,
never feel that pain, never, never, never know that
deep seated sorrow, ever again.

So she doesn't want to come. People have used
her sickness and her weakness as a reason to exclude
her, and that has caused her pain, and she doesn't
want to be hurt anymore/

But I was reading this week, and I came across a
short story and the title stopped me cold. The title of
a short story led me to write a new sermon, to scrap
the one I had prepared—even made slides to
illustrate—and to take a new approach for this first
Sunday of Advent. An Opening to the Light. That

was the name of the short story: “An Opening to the Light.” Vulnerability, as a means of encountering Jesus. That’s not what the story was about—not at all. But that is what the Scripture is about.

Vulnerability, as a means of encountering Jesus.

Imagine—this is a tough one—imagine that, today, the United States pulled all of its soldiers, sailors, airmen and women, marines—all of them, and all of the planes and ships and trucks and tanks and Humvees, every missile and all of the bombs and even the drones that hum through the skies around the world—brought them home. Trained each and every one of the men and women of the

military for great civilian jobs and put them to work keeping people well, building roads and bridges and hospitals, teaching children and adapting technology to uses that lift the human spirit. Melted down each tank and plane to create construction tools, removed the fuel from the missiles and bombs to power cities and factories, refitted ships to carry needed resources to our neighbors around the world. Imagine the concern, the fear—the panic, even—at our vulnerability. Imagine the vulnerability. The possibilities for calamity are almost overwhelming. The likelihood that other nations would follow

suit—remote, at best. So, not today; can we at least dream, look up, and say, “Someday.”

But—how about us? How about you and me. Could we try, today, to come home? Could we examine ourselves, look deep inside, see who we are and what we’ve become and identify the defenses we’ve built, the weapons we have stored up, the walls we have built? Could we admit—honestly, without hesitation—could we admit our fears and then identify what it is that we are really afraid of? Then—and only then—could we stop and consider just what the cost to us is of all these defenses, these walls, these weapons?

Jesus is the Light of the World. The darkness cannot overcome the Light. And, Jesus is coming. Again. It is not a question of if, not even, for those of us who are “Christmas People” a question of when. We know the opportunity of this season; we celebrate the possibilities. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Only we can block out the light from the life. In this season of Advent, as we prepare—whether we are buying gifts or setting tables, decorating the trees or mailing out cards or gathering, again, with our most beloved ones—only we can block out the light.

I'm asking my beloved sister—and I will continue to ask her, even beyond the point of annoyance—to create an opening to the light. And so I ask the same of you, as well. Let down your defenses; tear down the walls of separation and isolation, lock away the nuclear weapons of hurtful words and choose to forgive, forget and let go of all of the things that justify your unwillingness to be vulnerable in this season. Create, within your heart and in the depth of your soul, **an opening to the** light today. Don't miss it. Don't miss it, not this time, not this year. Let the light in, and let it shine in you for all to see.

It's a short term action with permanent consequences. It doesn't really take all that long to beat a sword into a plowshare, or to form a pruning hook from what was once a spear. But the change, once made, is permanent. Vulnerability takes courage. The tools can't be changed back. The iron won't take it, the metal won't bear the attempt to shape it yet again. The weapons of war, once converted to peacetime, aren't easily made weapons again. Peace requires vulnerability, and vulnerability is a permanent state. But vulnerability is essential, if the Light is to enter into You when He comes. And, once the light is in you, you will never

want to let it go. Let down your defenses this season, that they may never block the light; let the opening to the light be forever in your life.

Sometimes, the bravest thing you can do is to go home, again. Sometimes, it is to open the door to another who has come home.

Let's pray.

Jesus, Light of the World, let us be open to you this season. Make us to be vulnerable to peace so that we may receive You, whenever You come.

Shine in us, that the darkness may never overcome.

Amen.

