

## “Swords Into Plowshares”

Isaiah 2:1-5

Richard C. Allen

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“Hope,” as you know, is my middle name! My actual middle name is Clarke (with an e). Clarke was my grandfather Clemmer’s first name. He was a farmer, and farmers by definition are people of hope. He raised potatoes and strawberries, but his cash crop was blueberries. When I picture him preparing the soil and mulching the plants and spreading the fertilizer, I am bowled over by his perennial sense of hopefulness. If anyone can teach us about hope, it’s the men and women who till the ground, plant the seeds, pull the weeds, pray for rain; then anticipate the harvest.

I spent many a summer on the grandparents’ farm, known affectionately as Tamarack. There were tools and implements in the barn I had never seen before: a plow and a harrow and a field cultivator and a Ferguson 30 tractor. I was captivated by all of it. When I returned to my boring house in Westfield at the end of the summer, I carried with me a vision of the farm, and I began counting the days until I’d be once again dropped off at Tamarack the following summer.

It’s a good thing to carry in your heart a vision of life the way you hope it will be lived, a vision of life that is laced with hope, a vision of life that is not just a pipe dream, but is within the realm of possibility. So it is with Isaiah, the prophet. God has placed within his soul a vision of hope. It is a vision of swords beaten into plowshares, of spears re-forged into pruning hooks. It is a vision of the implements of war transformed into the implements with which I was so fascinated in Grandpa’s barn: plows and harrows and field cultivators and Ferguson 30 tractors. God’s vision is simple really: ‘Let’s use our resources to feed people.’”

To have hope is to believe that when God gets involved all things become possible. I find it stunning to read that Isaiah's vision imagines a day when the nations won't learn war anymore. War won't be necessary because everyone will have enough of what they need; everyone will regard everyone else as their neighbor; everyone will speak the same language, the language of hope; everyone will have the law of love inscribed on their heart.

As far-fetched as it may be to have this vision of hope raised up before us in 2016, when wars and rumors of war fill the pages of every newspaper, still it is essential to hold up this vision. When I visit New York City, I try to get over to the United Nations building. I don't wander inside. I stand outside, transfixed by the sculpture created by Evgeny Vuchetich, a citizen of the then USSR. His government presented the sculpture as gift in 1957. Entitled, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares," this extraordinary piece of art summons the nations of the world to imagine living together in peace, using our resources to grow and distribute food so that no one has to ever again go to bed hungry.

As I gaze upon that artist's modern interpretation of Isaiah's vision, I always hear John Lennon singing in my ear, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." The world needs dreamers! I'm glad to be numbered among them!

I've always appreciated the bumper sticker we used to see around here: *Think Globally; Act Locally*. As we think globally about beating swords into plowshares, we need to act locally to steer resources into maintaining farm land, into producing wholesome food, into keeping livestock healthy!

This is why we take our middle school youth to the Heifer Farm every other year, so they will feel more connected to the land and to all that grows upon it; so they'll know that eggs come from chickens and not from the grocery store; so they'll begin to form a spiritual bond with creation.

We had visitors from South Dakota last week, Everett Hunt and his family. Everett was a trustee of the Eagle Butte church when we lived out on the Cheyenne River Reservation. He has raised beef cattle for 50 years on the ranch south of town which his parents operated for 50 years before him. He's decided to turn the herd over to his son, John, who will be the third generation farmer to relate to that piece of the prairie. Everett's mother, Jennie, was a full-blooded Lakota woman. She's the one who taught me about the 'wateche' pot. It's their custom to always feed their guests a meal of buffalo soup and fry bread. But they then extend the hospitality by sending you home with enough food for the journey back to where you started. Thus, the need for a 'wateche' pot! This is why I always bring my Tupperware container to church potluck suppers, so I can have lasagna for lunch the following day! The Hunt Family stands out for me as a sign of what it means to relate to the land, to beat swords into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks. Their commitment to the land inspires hope within me.

So, I would invite everyone here to find ways to act locally to steer resources toward food production. Grow a few tomato plants! Invest in a local farm co-op. Get involved in a land-preservation trust. Raise some chickens. Keep some bees. See what's going on at the Audubon Center.

Isaiah was a dreamer. He had this outrageous notion that when we find ourselves relating intimately to the land, being stewards of the land, and to growing food and to satisfying hunger, we are far removed from the thought of going to war.

Isaiah didn't get this vision from a fortune cookie at a Chinese restaurant. He didn't get it from the bubblegum machine at the Manchester Mall. He received the vision from God. He shared that vision with his fellow citizens in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. as a way of revealing God's wildest hope for humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Whenever we align ourselves with Isaiah's vision, we are living in the greatest of hope! Amen.