

Sermon Notes – November 30, 2025

The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 3: 1-12

Peace Lutheran Church

“The Approaching Light of Christ”

Luther's doctrine of the “two kingdoms” holds that, in the present world, there are two authorities - the earthly and the heavenly. If the earthly (as Luther saw the pope of his day) were to become the heavenly authority, it would betray the gospel by making the teaching of Christ into law. But Luther firmly held that it is the place of the church, as a representative of the heavenly kingdom, to both praise and critique earthly rulers in accordance with God's justice.

In the Advent s season, today's readings challenge us to notice God's presence not only in Biblical history, but in the social and political ebb and flow of our day, just as the Biblical authorities did in their own times. Indeed, today's scriptures offer multiple models for this kind of Christian social engagement.

For the psalmist, political engagement takes the form of prayer - that God may endow the rulers with love, mercy and righteousness. This is not a mindlessly patriotic plea, but a faithful one for leaders who will work toward a society mirroring God's own grace, mercy and love. Whether in a time of political peace or unrest, this is a prayer of hope.

Isaiah, on the other hand, lives in a time of violence. His prophecy, therefore, looks toward a better time - expressing hope in a new leader who will judge with righteousness rather than greed and power, and decide with fairness and love. In Isaiah's context, this leader, who will “come out from the stump of Jesse” (Isa. 11: 1) is probably the newly coronated King Hezekiah, whose reforms brought relative peace and prosperity to Israel.

Christians, including Paul (Rom 15: 12), later applied Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus. However, it isn't necessary that the hope expressed by Isaiah be limited to any single time. The core message across both Isaiah and Romans is one that advocates for just government and leaders who desire to grow peace for all peoples. This is a vision worth pursuing in every-time. Thus, Paul and Isaiah model a manner of social engagement grounded in a hope that passes all understanding.

Even in Jesus' earthly lifetime, however, Isaiah's vision did not come to fruition. Jesus lived and died under the oppressive rule of the Roman

government. The Roman Empire maintained its governance through proxy rulers - leaders among their conquered territories who were granted limited privilege in exchange for maintaining Roman rule among their citizens as a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3: 7), though it should be noted that historically, not all Pharisees and Sadducees were Roman collaborators (many historians even identify Jesus himself with the Pharisaic sect). Thus John models a third response to the earthly kingdom-protest in the face of struggle. Whatever our approach, these readings remind Christina citizens of both kingdoms that even as we await Jesus' final return, we are called to work toward God's love, grace, and mercy in the meantime.