

Wednesday, December 3

With a contemporary hymn ringing in our ears, let's return to the words of Isaiah, this time paraphrased to give today's readers/hearers a closer connection through contemporary images set in secular idioms. A paraphrase seeks to express the **meaning** of text; this contrasts with a translation that seeks an accurate rendering of the original words and literary context. Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian clergyman, began his contemporary paraphrase of the Bible with the Psalms, published in 1994. These paraphrased Psalms were first offered to his congregation as a "means to encourage a more robust prayer life" among his church members. Here is his translation of Isaiah 5: 1-5

The Message Isaiah got regarding Judah and Jerusalem:

There's a day coming when the mountain of God's House
Will be The Mountain—solid, towering over all mountains.
All nations will river toward it, people from all over set out for it.

They'll say, "Come, let's climb God's Mountain, go to the House of the God of Jacob.
He'll show us the way he works so we can live the way we're made."

Zion's the source of the revelation. God's Message comes from Jerusalem.
He'll settle things fairly between nations. He'll make things right between many peoples.
They'll turn their swords into shovels, their spears into hoes.
No more will nation fight nation; they won't play war anymore.
Come, family of Jacob, Let's live in the light of God.

How do the NRSV images shift when spoken in Peterson's contemporary terms:

God will teach us his ways **vs.** He'll show us the way he works
He shall judge between the nations **vs.** He'll settle things fairly between nations
And shall arbitrate for many peoples **vs.** He'll make things right between many peoples
Swords into plowshares **vs.** spears into pruning hooks; swords into shovels **vs.** spears into hoes.
Neither shall they learn way anymore **vs.** they won't play war anymore.
Let us walk in the light of the Lord! **vs.** Let's live in the light of God.

What are you now hearing as the Prophet's meaning?

Prayer: Kind God, you have so many ways to teach us! Thank you for the light you bring to us through everyday hopes and fears, by miracles of words and inspirations, with the kindness of scholars, musicians, poets and prophets. May we learn by all the means you've given us—each in our own ways. Thank you for your amazing guidance. Amen.