

## **Sermon: Good and Safe Home**

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, December 22, 2024)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I admit I am a hog for politics, that is I love to consume political news, through CBC, CTV, or local talk radio. I try not to mix politics with religion; try not to let sermons I craft be tainted with too much of my own political bias. But I have to just say it out right: our federal government is in a mess.

The finance minister has resigned, the housing minister is not running, there are nine cabinet posts left vacant by disgruntled Liberals MPs departing the federal scene altogether, and Prime Minister Trudeau thinks it is business as usual, and simply proceeds to replace them with nine other mostly interchangeable and certainly dwindling Liberal loyalists.

Meanwhile, Canada is facing a 25% tariff threat on all goods going into the United States, soon to be imposed by the incoming president-elect Donald Trump. Trump, acting like a mean bully, picking on the weakest kid on the block, started to refer to our Prime Minister as ‘Governor Trudeau’, reducing a head of state to head of a state—a much lesser status. He even started to joke about Canada being the 51st states to the U.S. Ouch!

The fact that we allow our proud country to fall into such a weaken state, that’s on us. Look, I like to pick on our Prime Minister as much as the next guy, and while he is down, really down, he is not quite out yet. As one talk radio host puts it most brilliantly, for us to pick on Trudeau is like an older brother picking on his younger brother—it’s fine keeping it in the family. But if it’s done by an outsider, a neighbourhood bully, then that’s an absolute no no—keep your hands off my family.

Seeing Trump, figuratively speaking, slapping Trudeau like a rag doll, that really gets my blood boiling. In my humble opinion, we as a country needs to be united, needs to grow a stiffer spine, and perhaps be ready to hit back against Trump with a counter tariff, even cutting off critical resources that the United States actually need.

But how do you win a trade war against a country ten time bigger than us, with ten times more population, ten times more resources and one hundred times bigger and better military? How do you tell the president-

elect, in the most diplomatic way possible to 'shove it' and to 'buzz off', without risking the safety and security of this country?

By now you might be wondering: Pastor, what do all these have to do with the supposed theme of today, the Advent of love, the coming of Christ? Well, would it surprise you to learn that Prophet Micah in our lectionary reading today, was facing a very similar geopolitical landscape, in the 8th to 7th century BC, in the dying days of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as refugees streamed across the border to the Southern Kingdom of Judah?

Speaking mainly to the Judean people, Micah witnessed the arrogance of the Assyrian invaders, grieved at the Judean political elites kowtowing to the Assyrian bullies, balked at the tributes that the Judean had to pay to the Assyrian overlords, and lamented at how that trickled down hardship was having on average farmers and peasants. In short, Micah understood the malaise of his time.

But the prophet was not discouraged, instead he saw beyond his current circumstance to what God is promising to do. The God whom we worship is a God of promises, and Micah is God's messenger of hope. Despite the overwhelming evidence of despair and defeat everywhere, the messenger gives hope to a future that God has guaranteed.

A 'shepherd-ruler' is to come, in the not-too-distant-horizon. This ruler will not come from Jerusalem, the metropolitan, the elites, the traditional seat of power, but will instead come out of a small town called Bethlehem of Ephrathah, or David's country, who are one of the little clans of Judah. I love The Message version of the bible for this passage of Micah 5, calling this small town 'the runt of the litter', the smallest, the weakest of the bunch.

Yet, just as David who was the youngest, the almost overlooked shepherd-leader, the future leader is no upstart, no pretender. His family tree is ancient and distinguished. The Hebrew word used here is '*olam*', which is often translated as eternity or ever-lasting, indicating the background of this shepherd-ruler is from of old to that of eternal.

Meanwhile, Israel and Judah may appeared to have been given up by God, like being sent to foster homes, but the pain is only temporary, like the birth pangs are over once the child is born. Then, the scattered brethren shall be gathered back to the family of Israel, where this shepherd-ruler will stand in the strength of the Lord, and feed the scattered flock. This shepherd-ruler will rule in peace. He will be acknowledged and respected by others, and most importantly shall provide the people with security, or as

The Message version of this passage phrases it, with 'good and safe home'.

Security, good and safe home, isn't that what we are all after, longing for? We study and work, to build good stable careers. We find partners, build loving and hopefully lasting relationships, some of us have children. We save up, buy life insurances, invest in stocks and bonds, or commonly referred to in the modern day parlance as 'securities'.

But we don't feel secure for life is precarious, and so too are the so-called securities we purchase with money, and the mis-placed trust we put ourselves in: insurance policies, saving accounts, credit cards, accountants, physicians, or elected officials. Like a mirage, they are here today but gone tomorrow.

But we the communities of the Christian faith understand God's provision of true security lies in the One whose birth we will soon celebrate. Christ Jesus is our security. He is the living bread for our hunger, the living water for our thirst, and the life eternal in place of our death.

He is the shepherd-ruler foretold by Micah, the child born, son given, the Prince of Peace as foretold by Isaiah. Christ is to be our new heart and new spirit as foretold by Ezekiel, and Christ is to be the new covenant written in our heart as foretold by Jeremiah. Christ comes to give us good and safe home; Christ is, ultimately and figuratively, our good and safe home.

The Gospel reading today, in Luke 1, takes us to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It is yet another story of help in unexpected places from unlikely people.

Mary was an young, un-wed virgin carrying a child in her womb. Elizabeth was an older woman, and perhaps the best way to describe her is 'way passed her best-before date', yet also having a child in her womb. The two cousins with no pretension for greatness, met in an un-named local in the 'hill country'.

Yet when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the babe in her womb leaped with joy, prompting her to be filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out loud, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.*"

Two lowly women, two unlikely mothers, vessels of the promise of God, through whom the love of God is made real. Blessed, indeed are those who believe that the promise of God, spoken through the prophets shall come to pass. The call of Advent is a challenge for us to have the eyes, ears and hearts to listen for the least likely voices, and to expect the unexpected. The call of Advent is for us to believe.

Micah's people saw much wars, hardship, and abuse of power in high places. Could they believe that 'the peacemaker of the world', would soon visit them and deliver them from oppression, from bondage, from unbearable tributes or unreasonable tariffs? Could they believe that someone from the little, out-of-the-way Bethlehem would soon 'stand in the strength of the Lord and feed the scattered flock' to satisfy hungry stomach and thirsty hearts? Could they envision a future with hope, peace, joy and love, as God's blessings to humanity? Could they imagine a good, safe and affordable home for each and every one of God's creatures? Can we?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**