

It is a popular word in our eco-friendly culture. And while it may not be a word you use every day, the concept probably is. It is the concept of taking something that is no longer usable, wanted or needed and turning it into something that is. The word is repurposing. And if you want an idea of what I'm talking about take five minutes and look up repurposed CD's on Pinterest. You will see everything from clothes to clocks, chairs to charms, sculptures to light fixtures, and on and on. And if that's not enough, ask any auction house about how people repurpose and upcycle items that they purchase at auction.

But I wonder...how many farmers and horticulturalists are going to auction looking for *swords* and *spears* that they can repurpose into *plowshares* and *blades for trimming vines*. And yet that is exactly what Isaiah describes in our text for today – a repurposing of tools of war into tools of peace as a picture of the world the Messiah would bring. Only the beautiful picture goes way beyond swords and spears. It is beautiful picture that includes you and me. And as we drink in this beautiful picture and as we begin this season of Advent, please, join me in prayer...

We're talking about repurposed items this morning. But what is always so striking to me about repurposed items is not so much the creativity used to come up with new ideas for old things – though that is impressive - rather, what is striking to me is how something that was once so desirable – maybe even so desirable as to pay full price for it – has now been reduced in value to the point that it will be of more value as just about anything else than the original intent.

For example, hand-crafted paneled doors that were once created by skilled craftsmanship and that new today would cost \$1000 or more, can now be purchased at a warehouse for a few dollars, attached to a set of \$12 table legs, and voila: you have an attractive, artsy, coffee table.

I think, though, it really is a matter of perspective, isn't it? I mean, you see something one way, and then, due to time or circumstances, you see something in a different way. Finally, this is what Advent is all about and it explains the point that the Lord is making for us today through the prophet Isaiah.

The words of our text from Isaiah chapter 2 are an oracle – a specific prophecy - following the pronouncement of judgment against the sin of the people as recorded in Isaiah chapter 1. It is a parallel of a similar oracle in chapter 4 which, in that case, precedes the judgment against sin described in chapter 5. Chapter 1 – Judgment; Chapter 2 – Gospel Oracle; Chapter 4 Gospel Oracle; chapter 5 – Judgment. This is important for us to understand. We need to understand God's perspective of us as damned sinners, before we can understand God's perspective of us as repurposed saints. By God's grace, we are repurposed from worthless to priceless, like so many used CD's.

One such repurposed CD contained John Lennon's song, Imagine. As author Matt Woodley points out, the song itself is rather controversial; he imagines a live-for-today existence with no heaven and no hell, but at the same time he sees this heaven-less existence as a better place where (and I quote John Lennon) "the world can be as one."

It should go without saying, but I will say it anyway: I join you in confessing our faith in heaven, hell, and the blood of Jesus purifying us from all sin. And yet, in Lennon's godless despair there is a sad truth to be found: This world is broken and we are living our faith when we yearn for its healing. Because, by faith, we understand God's perspective of us as repurposed saints, our hearts are right to ache for a better world.

Sadly, our culture often fosters a complacent, blasé, smug approach to Christianity. Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote, "We are far too easily pleased." We'd much rather numb, freeze and self-delusionally satisfy our restless ache for a

better world than recognize it for what it truly is – a deep spiritual longing.

And the truth is, these weeks of Advent ignite that longing in us more than any other time of year. Before we rush into “Happy Holidays,” we pause and repurpose our hearts once again, letting the longing rise up within us as, in Advent, we catch a glimpse of a better world.

And as we catch glimpses of this Messiah-healed world, we long for its coming...now. Think about it, all of the best Advent hymns capture this spirit of groaning and longing for Messiah’s better world. Like when we sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” with its dark, unresolved melody, it cracks our hearts open with longing’s wound. And yet we know Messiah has come, even as we wait for him to come again. As such, Advent has been described as “a deliciously painful mix of joy and anguish.”

This Advent-like longing is at the heart of the Christian life of faith. Early Church Father and champion of the faith Augustine of Hippo was known to have said, “Give me one who yearns,...give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean.”

Again, C. S. Lewis. He claimed that in this life the Advent-like stab of longing serves as a spiritual homing device, placed deep in our hearts by God to lead us back to him. Advent trains us to ache again, to feel and even embrace the joyful anguish of longing for the Messiah’s birth and, when he comes again, the world’s rebirth.

Isaiah was not only blessed to see and hear of such a rebirth directly from the Lord, he was blessed to proclaim it and the difference it would make in the lives of those repurposed for divine intentions: ***This will take place in the latter days: The mountain of the LORD’s house will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it like a river. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. Then he will***

instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” For from Zion the law^[a] will go out, and the LORD’s word will go out from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations, and he will mediate for many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into blades for trimming vines. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore.

Solomon’s gleaming temple in Jerusalem stood on Mt. Zion for 400 years – a spiritual beacon for the faithful. Mysteriously and graciously the Lord was present in its Most Holy Place while innocent animal victims were daily offered as a picture of the coming Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Jesus said it to the Samaritan woman by the well and he says it to us gathered here today, “...***a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem...a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.***” (John 4:21,23) My dear Christian friends, we are in the last days. This is the Lord’s temple prophesied of through the prophet Isaiah. Wherever the message of the crucified and risen Christ is proclaimed, there...*here*...the Lord is present and active, ***instruct[ing] us about his ways, [that] we will walk in his paths.***

Yes, we are blessed to live here and now in Isaiah’s kingdom of peace – the kingdom of Christ’s church where the gospel reigns. Seize the opportunity your Savior offers you to live repurposed for his intentions in his kingdom right now. You have what it takes just as Paul assured the Corinthians, “***[We] do not lack any gift as [we] eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.***” (1 Corinthians 1:7) Let us then continually persevere in our hope. Longing for the better world to come, repurposed for a life of faith, confident in the peace he has won for us, ***O house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.*** Amen.