

There is an imaginative boldness, or perhaps rather the courage of desperation, in this vision of Isaiah (2:1-5). It is articulated in a historical moment of continual warfare among imperial powers. The land of Israel itself was threatened with destruction by invading armies.

The people *learned* war, a skill that required training. Isaiah had a dream—we might think of this like Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech—of a time when nations shall not learn war any more.

Menachem Begin, on signing the first Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, declared: No more wars, no more bloodshed. Peace unto you. Shalom, Salaam, forever.

Peace! Forever? We privilege realpolitik over dreams. We privilege cynicism over hope. Erich Fromm reminds us, “Those whose hope is weak settle for comfort or violence.”

Peace, like war, is learned. Peace is a skill requiring training. Isaiah wants the people to enter the house of God, to learn the ways of God and to walk in them. Such training is essential preparation for the flourishing of life, for peace.

We know training is necessary in every other pursuit. On the aesthetic level, learning to perceive deeper depths of beauty includes training or apprenticeship in the craft and tradition in which we are participating. A viewer may need to be shown how to open himself or herself to certain forms of beauty, or to be trained to read a painting.

A listener may need instruction in hearing tone and color in a symphony. A student may need to be trained to approach an object from different perspectives. A child or novice may need to be exposed to many instances of what others have recognized as beautiful before being able to form a coherent judgment.

Apart from diligent training, skills are but a dream. Apart from skills, flourishing is a mirage. We know this to be true in every pursuit worthy of our lives. It is also true of faith. Training in the craft and traditions of faith is necessary for the health of our souls.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, hippos are the sixth most deadly mammal to humans on the planet. Due to size and aggression, adult hippos are rarely preyed upon and predators—lions, the Spotted Hyena and the Nile crocodile—only target the young calves.

Most of us, I suppose, think hippos more adorable than deadly. We can buy sweatshirts printed with “Always be yourself unless you can be a hippo,” socks printed with cute hippos, ceramic vases in the shape of a hippo’s open mouth. However, I am told, if you have ever been on or near

the rivers of Africa, you know the hippo is an extraordinarily aggressive and territorial animal and very prone to attack.

Juliet Starrett is an amazing athlete, a two-time extreme white water canoe champion. She is also a lawyer and a survivor of cancer. A few years ago, Juliet was canoeing through the Zambezi River in Eastern Africa. It was on that trip that her canoe was disturbed by a hippo. Not so much disturbed as exploded.

Juliet was paddling along one second and the next she was ten feet in the air above the water. She says that she looked down and saw the chomping jaws of the hippo turning her performance canoe into splinters. While in the air, Juliet spotted the nearest shore and began swimming—*while in the air!* She was swimming in mid-air.

That kind of thinking while in the midst of a disorienting and dangerous tragedy, that cool appraisal of the situation and the prioritization of survival, that kind of thinking demonstrates what is sometimes called “ready-state.” Jesus advises the disciples to be ready, to be in a ready-state, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

A ready-state is characterized by the ability of a person to enter into just about any situation with equanimity and openness. Ready-state is not about being anxious and hyper-vigilant. It is mostly due to advance-work, namely, training. Consistent, intentional training, over time, allows for the ready-state.

Juliet was not expecting or planning for the hippo attack. Instead, she was simply trained and ready, and when the time came, her training and general ready-state kicked in. That is why we know her story.

If we doubt that peace is possible, if our hope is weak, we will have little or no motivation to learn the ways of God and even less to walk in them. Training in the craft and traditions of faith is how we achieve a ready-state.

The world may be disordered, but we don’t have to be. We all begin immature and unformed. We all bear a degree of responsibility for the disorder in our world. Overcoming the disorder in our souls is one way we prepare the way for the advent of peace.

Great souls did not become great without facing and overcoming great disorder. A Yale student working under a world-renowned scholar was unhappy with his grade. He asked how he could improve his next essay. The scholar replied, “Become a deeper person.” If our hope is weak we have little motivation to become a deeper person; we settle instead for comfort or violence.

A healthy and thriving culture is impossible without the participation of citizens who are educated intellectually, trained experientially, formed spiritually, growing morally. Hope for peace is both a goal and a catalyst for each of these disciplines.