

## **The Swordsmith Strikes Back**

Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

October 4, 2026 — Peacemaking/World Communion Sunday

*Based on Micah 4:1-4; beating swords into plowshares ...*

There was a time, those of us who are GenX and older will remember, when global peace and prosperity seemed well within our reach. Micah's vision coming true!

The Berlin Wall came down. McDonald's opened in Moscow's Red Square. Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa. A woman joined the Supreme Court and became Speaker of the House — *and* Associate Pastor for SPC. The Kyoto Protocol was initiated. The Internet became a thing. Social Security operated with a surplus.

Can you imagine?!

Shepherdstown was on the rise and so was SPC. None other than President Bill Clinton — the Man from Hope! — hosted a Peace Summit between Syria and the state of Israel right here in our fair city. The Rumseian Society recreated the world's first steamboat. The Contemporary American Theater Festival began drawing visitors from around the world. The congregation celebrated the sesquicentennial of this church building, noting the healing presence this space provided during the bloodiest day in American history.

Things were going great! At least on the surface ...

One political philosopher went so far as to call this period from roughly 1990 to the early 2000s *The End of History* (in a good way). Western liberal democracy had won the ultimate ideological battle, he said, and humanity had reached the endpoint of our evolution. Everything from here on out was going to be gravy ...

Oh, how times have changed!

Now we have forever wars and terrorism and genocide. Now we have invasion and civil strife and climate-denial at the highest level. Now we have the global rise of religious and ethnic nationalism and addiction to AI, whose very creators warn us could bring about the *end of history* (in a bad way, in about ten years).

It is easy to give up hope.

Instead, here with SPC, when peace and prosperity seem far away, we get to work. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, our Timeline tells us, we initiated a partnership with local Muslim communities and founded the PEACEFEST annual community-wide event dedicated to interfaith dialogue and non-violence.

In the wake of gun violence becoming an officially declared public health crisis, our Timeline tells us, we launched Guns to Gardens as a modern day witness to the dream of the prophet Micah that we would one day turn our swords into plowshares. In the wake of armed masked men with guns killing people on the streets with impunity, our Timeline tells us, we sent our pastor to Minneapolis to strengthen their moral opposition and bring her learnings home to strengthen our spirits here.

We do our part here with SPC, imperfectly, of course, to turn our spears into pruning hooks and our guns into gardening tools and contemplate the wisdom of the trees we sit under, as Micah teaches — that we might one day study war no more.

Would you believe our efforts are actually working, at least in part, at least at the local level? Over 100 unwanted guns, including semi-assault rifles, are off the streets and in our gardens because of Guns to Gardens. Local immigrants at risk of deportation, both within our congregation and encouraged by our Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee, find comfort and strength to carry on because we have chosen not to give up on them. People of all faiths — and those of no faith at all — join us in worship and witness because we welcome wisdom from all sources.

Even the backlash is a sign of success, culminating in the counter-offensive by second amendment activists to threaten the Guns to Gardens ministry. If none of this really made any difference in the end do you think anyone would be this upset about it?

They would not.

Even on a global scale, our efforts are working. People who were once less vocal about their Christianity are now boldly proclaiming The Way of Jesus as *we* understand it in the public square. On the Catholic side, Pope Leo is following in the footsteps of Pope Francis's commitments to liberation for the most vulnerable in our midst, inspiring a whole new generation to embrace a vision of revolutionary love through the Catholic faith. On the Protestant side, at least twelve pastors, seminarians, and former clergy have run for federal office in the United States this year on a platform of justice and compassion — a number the *New York Times* says is unheard-of in recent memory. Seven are still on the ballot this fall.

Whether or not these so called “woke Christians” win their elections is beside the point — and neither is this sermon endorsing any particular candidate. The point is that Micah did not give up on a vision of peace among peoples and nations in his own time of despair, we who share his vision in our time and place are not giving up, either.

In the midst of backlash, the psalmist tells us to lift up our eyes to the hills and find the help we need from the God who does not sleep or slumber. God will not let us stumble, the psalmist says. God will protect us from evil and guard our very life.

The prophet Micah tells us the same. There *will* come a day when these mountains all around us establish the foundation of God’s house. There *will* come a day when a New Jerusalem — the city whose very name means *peace* — will emerge from these walls. There *will* come a day when our singing and our dancing and our peacemaking will be streamed live around the world.

And on *that* day, the mouth of God will speak to us all.

And on *that* day nobody will live in fear.

And on *that* day, everyone will rejoice.

And I say, let *that* Day be *Today*!