A few months ago the Wall Street Journal ran an article about the ways in which companies hire new employees. The article referenced a study which compared those who had been hired based strictly on their resumes with those who had been hired based on their resume and an interview. The findings were interesting and perhaps counterintuitive. The study found that those who were hired based strictly on their resumes were the ones who turned out to be better employees. They speculated that the reason for this was that when you interviewed someone you ended up getting an employee who was really good at interviews, but when you hired based on a resume you ended up getting someone who could do the things that they said they could do on their resume. That is the resume reflected better on who the person really was. I thought about this today because of the reading that we have from Isaiah which gives us one of the prophesies about Jesus. The reading begins with a description about Jesus coming from the line of David and that he will be full of wisdom and understanding. It then offers this bit of information saying, “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” Or put in other terms, Jesus is going to judge us for who we really are, not for whom we appear to be, which might be a sigh of relief for some and may frighten others quite a bit.

One of the more bizarre news stories to come out this past year has been the so-called varsity blues scandal. This story centered on a guy named Rick Singer and his celebrity clients. The basics of the case are that in exchange for large sums of cash, Mr. Singer got these celebrities’ kids into the college of their parent’s choice. The way it worked was Mr. Singer knew what colleges wanted and would then fix the child’s profile to fit into those things that the colleges were looking for, be it a higher ACT score or participation in a sport. One of the most famous cases involved Lori Laughlin and her husband, who for some reason appears to be named, Mossimo. They paid Mr. Singer $500,000 and he then convinced the admissions department of USC that their two daughters were going to be on the rowing team, even snapping a picture of them on a rowing machine. Now why you would risk jail to go to USC is beyond me, but it points out how humanity can be fooled by certain actions. The daughters of Lori Laughlin had never been near a racing shell but with a few phone calls and some photos they were able to convince the right people that they did these things. They were eventually caught and their parents are being judged for what they did, but it illustrates the difference between who we are and who we want people to think we are. Hopefully, these are the same but often they are not. I think in the scientific literature this state of our outward appearance differing from who we actually are is known as Eddie Haskell Complex. And while this duplicity may have worked on Mrs. Cleaver it does not work on God -- that is what Isaiah is telling us today. For God is not interested in who we want the world to think we are but rather is interested in who we actually are. And here in Advent we are asked to look at, in the words of Pete Townsend, the real me, that is the person we actually are and then ask if the person we really are is the person that God calls us to be.

And that all sounds well and good, but who exactly does God call us to be? This seems to be a very vast topic and something about which thousands of books, reflections and sermons have been written. But for the sake of brevity let’s just focus for a moment on what our readings tell us. The vision that Isaiah gives says things like, “They will not hurt or destroy” in reference to how people will behave after the coming of the Messiah. Paul in the letter to the Romans says, “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The general image seems to be one of harmony and unity, where people are getting along, where there is not mistrust or animosity. And as we touched on a bit last week such harmony does not come from everyone doing what we want but rather comes from us making the world reflect God.

If you ever read arguments for the existence of God, one of the arguments that shows up fairly regularly essentially states that we are all born with an idea of what is right and wrong and that this idea of right and wrong comes from God. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* said it like this when reflecting on the time when he did not believe in God. He said, “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?” In other words when we look around and say that things are not right we must have an idea of what right looks like. Which often ends up being similar to how Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart described obscenity, claiming that he would know it when he saw it. And in some ways this can be similar to describing what harmony is – we know what it doesn’t look like and we will know what it looks like when we see it. It would be nice if there were a set of rules which we could follow in all times and places that would guarantee that we were acting in accordance with whom God calls us to be ensuring the harmony of which Paul and Isaiah discuss today, but often it’s not that simple because behaviors can change with circumstances. If your friend has had a rough go of things and you take them out for a beer this could help to restore harmony in the world, however if your friend is an alcoholic this would be a terrible thing to do. Again we come back to the fact that we will know it when we see it. Similarly, we know what the world looks like when it’s wrong. The other day I was driving and a car cut into traffic forcing a car in the other lane to swerve in front of me. In response to this a car who did not have to swerve got so incensed that they dodged in and out of traffic almost causing a few more accidents so that they could pull up along side the offending car and make a series of the types of gestures you usually see in Italy. So they took a bad situation and made it worse. The call for us though is to take bad situations and make them better – sort of like Paul McCartney tells Jude to do.

In a few moments when we will turn to our neighbors and say “peace be with you.” In this action we are essentially calling forth this harmony and tranquility that we are called to be agents of. For a bad analogy when we are called to bring harmony or to spread peace or whatever you want to call it we are called to be the alka seltzer to the upset stomach of this world. This is not easy, but this is who we are to be. We cannot come to Church on Sunday and look and act pious and then go out on Monday and act like my friend did in traffic. God wants us to be his from top to bottom, every day of the week, spreading peace and good will, so that we may be his both now and forevermore.