

“The Peaceable Kingdom”  
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 11:1-9  
Collegiate Presbyterian Church  
December 5, 2010

**Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19**

1 Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to a king’s son.

**2 May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice.**

3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness.

**4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.**

5 May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

**6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,  
like showers that water the earth.**

7 In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound,  
until the moon is no more.

**18 Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
who alone does wondrous things.**

19 Blessed be his glorious name forever;  
may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

**Isaiah 11:1-9**

1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
<sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand  
on the adder's den.  
<sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

#### Sermon

My sense is that there are very few words in the Bible  
that are better known or more loved than these from Isaiah.  
In fact, you may know  
that the 18<sup>th</sup> century artist Edward Hicks loved them so much  
he painted them more than one-hundred times.  
You've no doubt seen his prints hanging in pastor's offices  
or children's Sunday school rooms.  
The animals are all gathered in the foreground –  
wolf... lamb – leopard... kid – calf... lion.  
It's a very odd assortment!  
You notice their wonderfully expressive faces...  
some looking almost human.  
Notice how large some of their eyes are,  
perhaps suggesting that they are startled.  
You wonder if they might be puzzled  
by the fact that though they are wild beasts,  
they are not behaving as such.  
Lions are not devouring tender lambs...  
leopards are not attacking helpless sheep...  
children are present, but are in no danger  
as they play around venomous snakes.  
Clearly this is not an everyday occurrence!

Something that may be less well-known about these paintings  
is that off in the background Hicks has painted a scene in which  
William Penn negotiating a peace treaty  
with Native Americans.  
You see, Edward Hicks was a Quaker...  
a member of a so-called "peace church"  
which believed pacifism  
was the faithful response to the call of Jesus.  
No doubt this is why these words from Isaiah  
so captured Hicks's imagination in his time...  
even as they still capture our imaginations in ours.  
For the yearning for peace is timeless and universal.  
Everyone wants peace for themselves and their children.  
Everyone wants to be prosperous and healthy and safe.

It is a longing that is set deep within the human heart.

Well, for our Hebrew ancestors in faith,  
    this yearning for peace and well-being  
    is all wrapped up in their hopefulness for the next king.  
A bit like diehard Cubs fans,  
    they were always waiting for next year...  
        for the next king...  
    looking to him to bring light to their darkness.  
        hoping he would usher in the long-awaited time of shalom.  
At the beginning of each monarchy,  
    the new king would deliver an Inaugural Address  
        in which he would promise all of these things  
        and there would be great hope.  
Yet, though some were better than others,  
    but ultimately none of them lived up to expectations...  
        all of them disappointed.<sup>1</sup>

This was an experience Edward Hicks knew well  
    as time after time he painted this idyllic vision in Isaiah.  
You see, art historians have discovered that his renderings  
    of this Peaceable Kingdom changed over the years.  
As Hicks became more and more disappointed  
    with the kings of HIS age...  
        and the conflicts THEY waged...  
    as he grew more and more disgusted with how worldly  
        his Quaker brothers and sisters were becoming,  
    as he saw his beloved Society of Friends  
        torn apart by divisions in their body...  
IN HIS PAINTINGS the Peaceable Kingdom began to disintegrate:  
    animals begin to look old...  
    the tree becomes even more shattered...  
    the predators start to snarl and raise their claws...  
    and the children play a less prominent role.  
So disappointed is he about the lack of peace in his age,  
    it became harder and harder for Hicks to paint this miracle.

We understand that disappointment, of course,  
    because there e is something hauntingly familiar  
        about happened to Edward Hicks over the years.  
Have we not all at one time or another  
    found our shining ideals becoming tarnished?  
Have we not all grown more skeptical,  
    more world-weary,  
        more jaded?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "The Mission of the Servant," *The Presbyterian Outlook*, November 29, 2010, p.27

Perhaps a more contemporary version of this vision  
might better reflect our reality:  
It came to pass that all the animals of the forest  
met together in a great council and decided  
that they would together commit themselves  
to the creation of the Peaceable Kingdom at last,  
so that not one of them  
would ever hunt or hurt a fellow creature.  
Awhile later, a lamb strolling along  
came upon a lion snoozing in the shade.  
The lion's soft mane seemed an exquisite pillow for a nap,  
and he lay down and fell into the sleep  
of the Peaceable Kingdom.  
After awhile the lion awoke,  
saw the lamb leaning against him and ate it.  
Moral: There's always somebody who didn't get the memo.<sup>3</sup>

There are so many peoples and nations  
that are either unaware or just ignoring Isaiah's vision  
that it is hard to have hope for peace.  
It was no different for Isaiah,  
You see, the backstory of this vision is this:  
He is looking out on a battlefield and  
the entire landscape has been laid to waste -  
trees have been shattered and broken off,  
the ground was scorched and smoking,  
Israel's dead are lying all around him.  
It was clearly the end of any hope that a king can bring shalom...  
Yet as Isaiah surveys all this devastation  
suddenly his eyes land on one particular stump.  
There are so many stumps,  
but for some reason Isaiah's eyes land on this one...  
and he pauses -  
"Look! Out of that broken, smoldering stump  
a little green shoot is growing."<sup>4</sup>  
A tiny tendril... a little green sprig... a sign of new life growing  
out of an all-but-dead stump.  
This shoot, whom Christians name "Jesus,"  
He will be wise and not just politically savvy.  
He will preside over a government  
that protects the poor and the weak..

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<sup>2</sup> K. C. Ptomey in his sermon on this text, preached to Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN., December 9, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Rick Spalding, Chaplain to the College, Williams College, as quoted by K.C. Ptomey.

<sup>4</sup> John Buchanan, "Preaching the Advent Texts: Hope, Peace and Courage," *Journal for Preachers*, Advent 2010, p.10

He will bring warring sides together to make a lasting peace.  
He will not just promise to do this, he will do it.  
And the best news of all, my friends...  
    the best news of all is that none of this depends  
        on whether or not you and I believe it is possible.  
The coming messiah and the peace he will bring is not dependent on  
    whether we are optimistic  
        about the latest round of Palestinian-Israeli talks or  
        whether North and South Korea can stand down or  
        whether the Senate ever ratifies the START agreement.  
The good news is that this vision is God's vision...  
    it is God's promise...  
    it is God's hope...  
        and it will be fulfilled.

And the wonderful thing FOR US is that  
    such confidence in God's hope for peace...  
such trust that God's promised end will come to pass...  
    frees us up to act NOW in ways that are consistent  
        with that end.

It's like being on a train platform  
    waiting for your loved one to arrive.  
You're standing there on the edge of the platform  
    looking down the tracks  
        that in the distance disappear around a curve.  
You know the train is coming...  
    you strain to see the lights when they finally appear.  
But there is nothing you can do,  
    either to make it arrive sooner or to delay its coming.  
As much as you long to see those lights,  
    as much as you have yearned for this moment,  
    the intensity of your longing  
        cannot move one ounce of steel even an inch along that track.  
Yet, you are utterly certain the train will come  
    and your beloved will be on it.

And because of that suddenly you are free  
    to notice all of the other people  
        who are waiting with you:  
the elderly couple waiting for their daughter,  
    a child fussing in her mother's arms,  
a businessman impatient for the next stage of the journey.  
Your joy at the coming of your beloved  
    allows you to embrace them all... to care for them all.  
The elderly couple needs a place to sit down,

the mother may need an extra pair of hands  
to handle all the baby's gear,  
the businessman may welcome a little conversation  
about something... anything but the next appointment.<sup>5</sup>

Sisters and brothers, we don't have to be optimistic  
about the prospects for peace in our world  
to be peacemakers.

We don't have to have hope  
to be about God's work in the world.  
God has HOPE ENOUGH for ALL us!

So now...  
may the God of hope fill you  
with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> An analogy was used by Beverly Gaventa in an address to the annual conference of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, Atlanta, GA., November 2, 2007, and used by K.C. Ptomey in his sermon cited above.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 15:4,13.