

*Peace is on the way.* A sermon preached on the second Sunday of Advent at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC on December 4, 2016 by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: ISAIAH 11:1-10  
LUKE 4:14-22

Where is God now?  
Does he really care?  
Or is it our lot just to helplessly twist in the wind?

First it was the Assyrians sending people in Jerusalem into captivity – long marches, much suffering, cruelty and death along the way. Then when Judah thought things could not get any worse, over the hill come the Babylonians who conquer the Assyrian army and decide – what the heck, let's take what remains of Judah! So yet another conqueror enters Jerusalem. Only this time Jerusalem is razed and those who have survived Assyrian military occupation are marched off to captivity in Babylon.

This captivity is marked in many of the psalms of disorientation or lament. Perhaps the best known of these Psalms is 137 which begins with the plaintive and evocative words

**By the rivers of Babylon—  
there we sat down and there we wept**

**when we remembered Zion.**

**<sup>2</sup> On the willows<sup>[a]</sup> there  
we hung up our harps.**

**<sup>3</sup> For there our captors  
asked us for songs,**

**and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

**<sup>4</sup> How could we sing the LORD’s song  
in a foreign land? (vs.1-4)**

Low on hope, peace simply not part of their ordinary lives,  
There speaks the prophet Isaiah – this morning’s reading.

Let’s be real clear!

Isaiah was no superhuman messenger dwelling in a state of religious ecstasy and completely oblivious and unaware of the tragic reality unfolding around him.

I wonder, had Isaiah reached the end of this hope  
I wonder if he ever asked –where is God in this mess sort of questions

I wonder if he laid his own feelings before a seemingly unresponsive God and said – too many years! Too long without a single sign!

I have been proclaiming this messianic hope that never shows even a glimmer of possibility

If Isaiah had such moments and owing to his humanity, we would not be surprised if he had,  
We are never clearly told

I wonder, did Isaiah like the Psalmist, lament about his situation, and God's seeming absence. Again, lament is not part of the prophet's book. I believe he must have, for it is out of such lament that comes such depth of hope as Isaiah expresses so powerfully over and over again. It is what gives the prophet's words the power to be reheard in successive generations!

Yes, says Isaiah, we are weary!  
 Yes, we are beat down by the stresses of our lives — stresses compounded by the turmoil of war,  
 The chaos of being driven from everything familiar.  
 And captivity is so disorienting  
 But ... **peace is on the way** because out of this destruction, disorientation and turmoil of war and chaos, a green shoot will sprout!  
 What looks dead is not  
 There is life  
 There is hope  
 It is not grand, but small  
 It is not big, but fragile at this point, but **KNOW IT IS THERE (11:1)**

The imagery of a tree stump to describe that all is not lost is used elsewhere in scripture.

God has not abandoned us  
 Think of the image for a moment — have we not all experienced seeing shoots of new growth coming out of what was thought to be just a dead old tree?

Forests of the World, Ancient Forest, your backyard?

Or think of an area ravaged by fire.

We wonder if it will ever be green again

In time, green does come back doesn't it. It starts slowly, takes years, and usually is not the same green

The destruction caused by the fire is never forgotten, but there are the beginnings of fresh and new life present.

**Peace is on the way** says Isaiah.

The cyclic violence experienced by the Israelites addressed by Isaiah here in chapter 11

And in generations of peoples since is NOT GOD'S WAY.

And with this shoot and/or branch (and not just any old shoot or branch, but one from the family of King David – believed to be the greatest of all Judaic kings) – there shall come something else--nothing less than *the spirit of the living God*.

It is this spirit that will enliven and give power, energy and courage to those upon whom it rests.

It is the spirit of the Lord who has the capacity to do what the world believes is impossible – including the creation of peace unknown since Eden,

Described in the opening chapters of Genesis!

In way ways?

The ability to distinguish between appearance and reality (vs.3)

Justice that is straight and equitable for all people.

Evenhanded justice for all people.

There shall be no manipulation for power.

There shall be no action taken based on hidden agendas or fear of what influential others might think, say or do!

Then Isaiah shares with his readers, then and now, a wonderful picture

**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.**

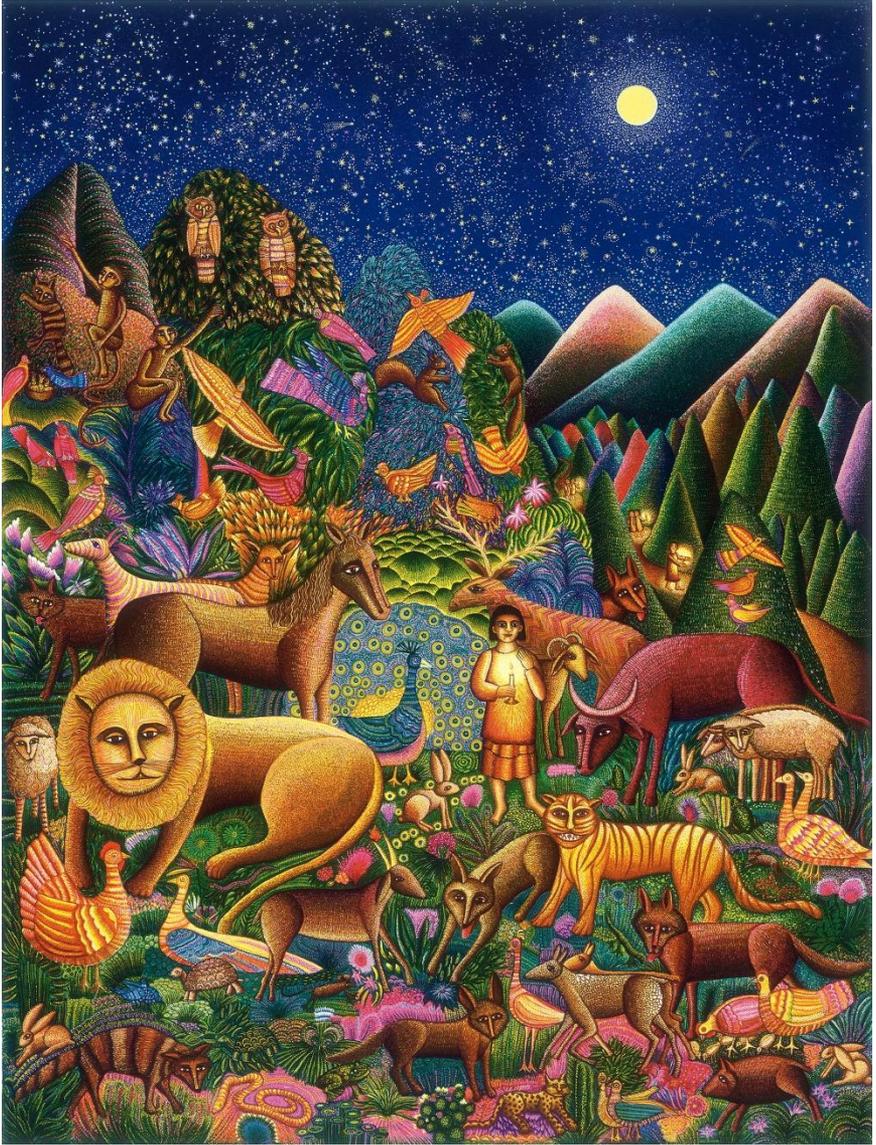
**<sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of  
the LORD**

**as the waters cover the sea.<sup>10</sup> On that day  
the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to  
the peoples; the nations shall inquire of  
him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.**

About what is possible if the Spirit of the Lord is given free rein in peoples' lives – **the peaceable kingdom.**

It is not the first time artists have taken to painting the scene.

19th century American folk artist Edward Hicks was so captivated by these verses in Isaiah and the idea of the peaceable kingdom that he painted a version of it several times late in his life.



This is not a copy of Hicks' painting, but a painting by contemporary American artist John Swanson —

whose works we have seen most recently in the Ruth series of sermons last spring.

Like all of Swanson's paintings, there is energy and brightness in the painting isn't there.

What do you see?

Encourage you to come up afterwards and take a closer look or check him out on the web--- google John Swanson, Peaceable Kingdom

This is a world safe for the vulnerable

There is no need for injury,

No need to devour,

No yearning for brutal control

No need for domination.

The people with the lamps are not aggressively in charge – clearly, they are part of the scene!

Lions and lambs

Lots of bunnies, near to their predators, but nothing is hunting something else

It is a picture full of details and possibilities – more as you look at it frequently!

Is it unrealistic?

Is this peaceable kingdom some even within the community of faith dismiss as nice, but not going to happen?

Look at Aleppo, the Balkans of a few years ago; look at countries in Africa, South East Asia and the 1960's-70's killing Fields of Pol Pot in Cambodia

Look at the continuing racial tension in the US

Look at the racism in this country

Think of natural disasters and their destructive results!

All true and valid statements

For the Fall described in the early chapters of Genesis does not only spoil a planned relationship God was to have with us,

It also causes the whole of creation to slip out of joint – natural and animal kingdoms

What Isaiah is claiming?

What pictures like Swanson's describe IS seemingly impossible – the reversal and return to an Eden like existence BUT FOR ONE IMPORTANT THING – *the Spirit of the Lord – the acknowledged and active presence of God in the lives of every human being.*

True, I may well not see the realization of the Peaceable Kingdom in my lifetime, nor may you. However, I live in faith that what God says will happen and says it through his word,--will indeed happen.

Aging is a great teacher and reminder that God works on his own timetable – καιρος –

Not our definition of time – hours, minutes, days, years – χρονος

Does this give us rationale to do nothing – just wait around as if we are waiting for a plane, train or bus?

Absolutely not!

As people who are strengthened and live as full of the spirit of the Lord people – read, people who

acknowledge their dependence in all of life upon God's Spirit – there are things we can do!!

*We can certainly continue to pray for those living in the world's hot spots.*

*Praying particularly for the women, children and the elderly, who along with truth are always among the first casualties in any conflict?*

*As we are able, we can financially support relief operations in these areas.*

*We can educate ourselves about the world in which we live – not only about the military hot spots, but about the environmental realities we all face.*

*We can and must also realize that achievement of this peaceable kingdom is built on how we in our lives as God's people, followers of Jesus, remain open to the free and full operation of the Spirit of the Living God!*

How so?

Moving toward the full realization of the peaceable kingdom begins and continues with acknowledging that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – Paul's words, not mine – gives them more punch!

Not one of us can ever move toward a peace within ourselves, let alone God and others without the help of God in Jesus

Without that help in an ongoing and intentional way, we will still be reluctant or do what we are so good at doing – rationalize and self-justify our behavior and thoughts – far too often!

Self-justification and rationalization acts like an acid in our souls and sometimes in our bodies.

Can you even begin to realize the difference it would make in our lives?

In the lives of the people – family, friends and all others,

If by God's help and in his strength we were to return soft answers to sharp criticisms,

To be polite when we receive rudeness and attitude

To try to be understanding when we are confronted – as each of us will be – by ignorance, and obtuseness

To restrain snap judgements

To remember that Jesus died as much for that person or persons with whom you are really out of sorts, as he died for you

What would the difference be if we were to live together as people who have been forgiven a great debt,

If we were as eager to forgive others as we are to seek forgiveness

If we were to stand for what is right and just, not  
because we will benefit from it later,

But because it is right

If we were to try to be more understanding of  
peoples' situations and circumstances.

If we were to be gentle – not doormats to the  
world's feet, but gentle – to stop looking for things  
about which to find fault or mistakes!

What if each of us was to in some way,  
transfer the grace and mercy,  
We ourselves have received from God first -to  
everyday living?

Would such move the realization of the  
peaceable kingdom forward?

Absolutely!

Many of us would not be so discontented, crabby  
and walking about with chips on our shoulders and  
attitude!

To be 'channels of God's peace' as the hymn  
attributed to St. Francis of Assisi calls us to be –  
don't come easy –

To be "channels" makes us more vulnerable and  
open to be taken advantage of

It will make us more dependent upon God

It will force us to take a long view of life and God's  
working in our lives and in this world!!

It is easy to be critical.

One of the posts that came through on my Facebook page a couple of weeks ago

*The world is a magical place full of people waiting to be  
offended by something*

Here in Isaiah 11 and elsewhere in his book, Isaiah never dismisses or makes light of the nasty, brutish and shortness of life, He acknowledges its pain, but he also says -this is not all there is-'Hang On, God is most definitely in control. Wait with expectancy and hope – for He will act And the 'peaceable kingdom' is most definitely on His agenda.