

**Scripture Lesson:** Isaiah 11:1-10

*Pew Bible O.T. pg. 602-603*

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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 for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed 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 will feed 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.

Isaiah 11:1-10

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“Signs of Peace: The Wolf and the Lamb Together”

Rev. Amy Terhune

There's an old philosophical question that goes like this: (You've probably heard it before...) If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around to hear it, does it still make a noise? Must sound or noise have a 'hearer' in order to be sound or noise? My answer to that question has always gone like this: who cares? Maybe that's a cop out—you'll have to tell me—but let me make this assertion: If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around to hear it, it may or may not make noise, but it most certainly makes an impact. Sometimes, when they fall, a portion of their root system comes right up out of the ground with them, a tangled mess suddenly exposed, and a deep dark hole is left gaping in the landscape. Sometimes the trunk breaks, and a majestic old tree comes crashing down. In time, its leaves die, its branches are carried off by animals and birds, and the trunk remains, slowly growing soggy, moldy, decaying into the earth from which it sprung.

It might interest you to know that there is a name for such a trunk of a fallen tree. It's called a 'nurse log'. For although the fallen tree is technically dead, "...in reality that dead tree is thriving. It is busy giving life to a whole new generation of the forest. It provides sustenance and harbor for fungi, insects, and small animals. The decaying surface of the dead tree creates a perfect growing medium for a tiny seed, a struggling seedling. The decaying tree becomes nursemaid to saplings that will grow in its place.

".... That's the same image, the same eternal care that this week's Isaiah text describes with such poetic power. The Messiah that is coming—that Israel waits for, hopes for, longs for—will come, but notice how the prophet describes his coming. He doesn't describe a giant, or a sudden storm of divinely-charged power. There's no pillar of cloud or fire, no pomp and majesty. Instead, the prophet's image starts small. Israel's long-awaited Redeemer arrives as a shoot—a tiny, tender, green sprout.

"This shoot doesn't spring up out of a carefully prepared, plowed and furrowed field. Its source for germination is the decaying stump of an old, once-powerful name. Jesse—the grandson of Ruth and Boaz and the father of eight sons, the youngest of which was a shepherd boy named David.

Jesse was thus the father of the entire line of the Davidic monarchy. Jesse gave life to a king, who in turn gave life to the greatest age of power and influence in Israel's history. [3 ¶s adapted from "Christmasize Your Life" by Leonard Sweet, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

But by the time Isaiah is writing, the greatness of King David's Israel is no more. Removed by several centuries at least, Isaiah's contemporaries, trapped in exile from their homeland, utterly forsaken and miniscule in a contest of superpowers, have only the memory of David sustained in scriptures and legend. And some 600 years after Isaiah, little has changed. The names of the superpowers have morphed from Babylon to Rome, but the people awaiting the Messiah when Jesus is born are in virtually the same condition—trapped, manipulated, terrorized—hardly daring to cling to the same, receding, practically dead hope that another David will spring out of the woodwork, so to speak. They want a king that will squash their enemies, not love them! A king that will break down doors, not knock at them! A king that will be lord and master, not servant or sacrifice. A king that will wring and squeeze every last drop of blood for the heart, not reshape it! But reshaping the heart is how God reshapes the landscape of time and history. For too many, the dream had died, the eyes passing right over a shoot from the stump. A baby in a stable. A life, at once fragile and incarnated possibility. All of which seems to suggest that the things that matter often start small – so small that we may discount them, fail to see their worth.

Isaiah foresees that out of this fragile little shoot will emerge the peaceable kingdom. Or as Isaiah describes it, Lions and wolves and poisonous snakes get along quite peacefully with lambs and cattle and children. Which, for most of us, is a strange image. How does that work? And a lion eating straw like an ox? A lion can't survive on straw. It will die. It's that simple. The natural order of things requires life and death in the great circle that sustains one generation after another. Which is how we think. But I suspect two things: First, I rather suspect that Isaiah is saying that in the new world, the old rules won't apply. He doesn't have any concept of scientific principles. That's not what this is about. He's talking about the rules that at present limit our hearts, our minds, our dreams, our vision. Second, I rather suspect that Isaiah is also referring to the lions and lambs that live within each of us. The same people who sing carols at the nursing home one day, may be found in the mall parking lot the next day cursing and spitting obscenities as the mass of humanity at Christmastime lunges for a great economic killing at the super sales.

Today, our focus is on the theme of peace. This week, *Christianity Today* published an article by Bonnie Kristian entitled: "Why Are We So Cynical About Peace on Earth?" In it, she noted, "We tend to talk as if longing for peace and pursuing it is the province of Neville Chamberlain, Jimmy Carter, and John Lennon, a sign of weakness in peaceniks and appeasers who either don't understand the evil that besets us or have no moral gumption to fight it. I've heard "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt. 24:6) invoked to prooftext unrest as normalcy far more often than I've encountered confident Christian expectation of God's peace." [<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/december/ukraine-war-why-are-we-so-cynical-about-peace-on-earth.html>.]

But this resignation that enable us to accept war and bloodshed as inevitable and even positive is morally and theologically impoverished. As Bryan Latimer played so beautifully during the Offertory, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." That is always where peace begins, which is perhaps why the image of the fragile little shoot from a stump is so powerful. As I noted in the church newsletter, conflict can be productive. It does not necessarily have to lead to animosity, anger, fighting, or division. On the contrary, conflict can spark conversation, brainstorming, and teamwork. Peace is a choice we make a thousand ways every day. The key is to be aware of our emotions during moments of disagreement, and to understand our automatic responses so that we respond to the person and situation rather than our own internal brokenness. The fact is, all of us have trigger points.

This is human. But failing to recognize and understand them causes hurt, anger, division, and an overall unhealthy system/culture.

Peace is NOT the absence of conflict. Rather, peace is the work that bring reconciliation and solutions. Peace begins inside each of us. Peace begins with self-knowledge, humility, and reflection. Peace is so difficult because it requires hard work within our minds, hearts, and spirits. It feels counter-intuitive that we must accept inward turmoil for a time, in order to find our peace. It is so difficult because being honest with ourselves can be painful. But the fact remains that peace will not exist in our world, our relationships, or our churches until it is found within ourselves. The Prince of Peace, who calms the wind and waves on the sea, can likewise calm the thoughts and emotions that immediately riot within us. The wonderful Counselor can help us understand our own responses, and give us the courage to forgive ourselves and others. And peace within ourselves will ultimately lead to peace amongst humankind. Which is why God re-shapes the heart in order to re-shape history and culture.

This Advent, I invite you to believe again that peace is possible; to cultivate it within yourself, that wolves and the lambs within us may find harmony and we may know the peace that passes understanding. May it be so. Amen.