

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Peace is... The Chance to Rest

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NRSVUE)

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

²The 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.

³His 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,

⁴but 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.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed^[b] together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They 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.

¹⁰On 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.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 3:1-12 (NRSVUE)

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.' "

⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in the second week of Advent, and of our sermon series, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. We are given from Isaiah a vision of a new thing coming after the destruction of an old thing. We are given a vision of the predators lying down with prey. In the midst of destruction, while Assyria tears through the nation of Israel, this is the vision the prophet gives us.

It is difficult for us to imagine that peace is possible when we are in seasons of destruction, whether that destruction is inflicted on us by another person, a systemic issue, our even by ourselves. Hope lies in our ability to imagine that change is indeed possible. Advent is the season where we sit with that possibility; in her darkest season, the church dreams of the light returning. And this vision, this possibility, this "fragile but persistent hope of God's peace" brings with it an honesty that things must change.

For predators to lay down with their prey, the predators must change, and the once prey must trust that they will not be attacked. It doesn't undo what the predators have done in the past. But, just as a new "shoot shall come out from the stump," and a "branch shall grow out of [those] roots," the destruction done is acknowledged as well as the new life, and the new ways that come from it.

In short, we are never too far from God's love to make change in the world. Sometimes there's something that needs to stop, or to change, so that a new thing can emerge. A new peaceful thing. A more gentle way.

Isaiah's vision is filled with a creation that engages with each other through eating, resting, and

playing. What needs to go away so you can renew your spirit and find rest in the Lord? What needs to change? It's Advent again and again we are invited to dream. We are invited not to deny the difficulties around us, or inside of us, but to name them and hold on to that fragile but persistent hope of God's peace.

Discussion Questions

1. What needs to go away so you can renew your spirit and find rest in the Lord?
2. Where do you feel like you experience or witness predators in our world?
3. Where do you witness a new thing coming after the destruction of an old thing?
4. What are you trying to dream about, trying to imagine, this Advent season?
5. How can the prey learn to trust the predator? Is it possible?

Prayer

Holy God you are making all things new. Your Spirit moves with the changing of each moment and each season of creation, of the church, and of our lives. Renew your vision of peace in our mind's eye, individually as well as collectively. Hold our fragility in your assuring grace in this tender, wily season. Bring us to dream again of your peaceable kingdom. **Amen.**

What needs to go away so that something new can emerge?