December 13, 2020 Isaiah 11:1-10 Advent Between Two Worlds: Peace

Rev. Kerry Smith Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Isaiah 11:1-10 Inclusive Bible

Then a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse; from Jesse’s roots, a branch will blossom: The Spirit of God will rest on you – a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and reverence for God. You will delight in obeying God, and you won’t judge by appearances, or make decisions by hearsay. You will treat people with fairness and will uphold the rights of the land’s downtrodden. With a single word you will strike down tyrants; with your decrees you will execute evil people. Justice will be the belt around this your waist – faithfulness will gird you up. Then the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the lion cub will graze together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear; their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The baby will play next to the den of the cobra, and the toddler will dance over the viper’s nest. There will be no harm, no destruction anywhere in my holy mountain; for as water fills the sea, so the land will be filled with knowledge of God. On that day, the root of Jesse will serve as a symbol to the peoples of the world – nations will flock to you, and your home will be a place of honor.

Peace. How can we bring peace to our world? We hear Isaiah’s words and we wonder if it is attainable. It sounds so magical, cows eating with bears, their young lying down together. A toddler dancing in a snake’s nest, no thank you! A world where there is no harm, no destruction anywhere. The entire world filled with knowledge of God. The prophet Isaiah is speaking beautifully about this coming leader who will usher in a new era of peace and harmony. The spirit of God will rest on him, with a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength. This coming leader won’t judge by appearances or make decisions by hearsay. They will treat people with fairness and uphold the rights of the downtrodden. Then, that part that sounds familiar, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child will lead them. A vision filled with hope and expectation about a time of great peace.

It is an impossible vision of community. A world where our natural enemies, wolves and lambs, lions and calves, and poisonous snakes and children, live without fear or hatred towards the other. How do we even begin bringing this vision to life? A world of harmony not only among us as people but also in nature. Where do we even start?

I love listening to podcasts. When I hear about a good podcast, I like to listen to them from the beginning. Kristi Hassell had recommended Brene Brown’s podcast, *Unlocking Us*, so I started listening. One of the first ones is from March 31. Do you remember March? The pandemic was new, and the podcast guest was a grief expert, David Kessler.[[1]](#footnote-1) He had worked with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross who theorized the five stages of grief. David Kessler has a new book about his sixth stage of grief, finding meaning.

David Kessler shared about when his life was turned upside down with the sudden death of his twenty-one-year-old son. He then shifted to talking about the grief that we have felt since the pandemic began. We have all felt a collective loss of the world we knew. And like every other loss, we didn’t know what we had until it was gone. We don’t miss our family member who drove us crazy until they are no longer living. We don’t miss our super hard teacher until we are no longer in their class. We don’t miss our neighbor who never raked up their leaves until they move away.

David Kessler talked about how we are all trying to find ways to virtually hold each other’s hands as a way to remind ourselves that we’re in this together. It is not going to be forever. This will end. He said, “There isn’t a dark night that stays.” We want normal back because we have had this loss of physical connection, loss of routine, loss of work, and loss of physical touch. We no longer gather for meals or gather for worship. We don’t have time to count the losses because there have been so many.

One of the things that was said in that podcast that has been rattling around in my brain is when our tank is empty, we cannot fill each other up. How can we bring peace to our world? We have to accept that we might need to care for ourselves first. When our tank is empty, we cannot fill each other up. To be a peacemaker, first we have to find peace in ourselves. We have to take time for ourselves, to be filled up by the Spirit of God – that spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, of knowledge and reverence for God.

The other night I was feeling overwhelmed. The to-do list was long and the sink was filled with dishes, the washer and dryer were filled with clothes and I had just remembered that I had to get the Girl Scout cookie order in by midnight. The most important thing was the Girl Scout cookie order. I think that my frustration was showing on my face because my thirteen-year-old son asked if I was okay. He doesn’t normally do that so I wondered if he was okay! I told him that I had a lot to do. He told me to go get a glass of water, and to work on my sermon. I hadn’t mentioned to him that I needed to work on my sermon, but I guess he thinks I’m always working on my sermon? The riskiest thing in your life is to let yourself be loved. To admit that we are vulnerable, that we need help, that we need a hug, that we need to get a glass of water, breathe in God’s love for us, and let ourselves be loved.

I am so thankful for this Bible passage that helps me envision the world as it should be. The peaceable kingdom. In our world we see Christmas trees everywhere, but in Isaiah there is a stump. We have the promise that out of that stump will grow the Messiah who will bring in the peaceable kingdom. We feel the pain and loss of this world with all of its hurt, but that’s not a bad thing. Now that we feel it, we can heal it. We can join with God working toward peace and justice and righteousness.

Lee and I lived in England for a year in 2001 and I learned about Boxing Day. Boxing Day is December 26 and it was when the servants celebrated Christmas. The day after Christmas was a day off for the servants who had worked so hard during the Christmas season. It was the day when business as usual was suspended. In Downton Abbey language, it was when the masters of the house gave presents to the staff. We are hungry for the world turned upside-down. A world where God’s peace is with us even though everything else feels topsy turvy. A world where the most threatening creatures lie down with the weakest of creatures.

A lion is always going to be a lion, but the lion will no longer be a threat. There is a predatory nature of creation. Prey and predator. Wildebeests, cheetahs, and gazelles. Have you ever watched a Nature TV show and you’re rooting for the animal to get away and they never make it? They always get eaten! Could we offer hospitality to the one-time predator? I immediately placed myself with the lambs offering welcome to the lion, but I wonder if sometimes we are the lion? Sometimes we are the ones who are using our power for evil, injustice, and oppression.

The prophet Isaiah is speaking hope in a time of terror and justice in a time of oppression. Isaiah is speaking about safe spaces, reassuring the people that God is with them. How can we be a safe space, a place that brings peace to our world? Have you ever seen a plant growing in a crack in the concrete? How can we be that plant? How can we bring peace to our areas of influence? How can we bring peace to where we live, where we work and where we play?

We have the world as it is and the world as it could be. Reality and possibility. We have our selfishness, our racism, our individualism, our lack of neighborliness, injustice, all of it. And then we have God’s vision of the peaceable kingdom. We have lost so much, marriages, hearts have been broken, jobs and income has been lost. We are overworked and tired. Through it all, God grows a new tree out of a stump. God calls us beloved and gives us a vision of peace. Now we ask God the gardener to cultivate peace within us. Wild, unexpected, hopeful, redemptive peace that brings forth life we never imagined. God asks us to repair the world at our feet, so let’s get to work! Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. https://brenebrown.com/podcast/david-kessler-and-brene-on-grief-and-finding-meaning/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)