

Peace in Believing
Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13
December 4, 2016
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Isaiah 11:1-10: A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 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; 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. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 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. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 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.

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.

Romans 15:4-13: For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope."

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.

A recent newspaper article stated that this year among family members, political tensions are so high that many are canceling their holiday plans to be together. Others have made agreements to avoid talking about politics at the holiday table in an attempt to keep the peace. "Last year," one person reported, "we were able to discuss the plight of the Syrian refugees. I fear that this year we may be reduced to talking about the weather. The problem though, is that even if we talk about the weather, it could lead to a discussion about climate change. There is just no way to escape it." So certain family members are opting to make other plans with friends for the holidays; friends that are more like themselves and hold similar beliefs.

In the New Testament passage from Romans, Paul writes, "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus." He wouldn't have needed to write this if there was already harmony among them. "Welcome one another," he continues, "just as Christ has welcomed you." Presumably there has been a lack of welcome, for him to have to write this to the church in Rome.

The Gentiles had been considered outsiders of the Jewish faith, and were now being invited in to the fold. This welcome, however, incited conflicts; conflicts over traditions like foods to eat and not eat, and whether to circumcise or not to circumcise. Paul in the letter to the Romans is addressing these conflicts of how Christians are to live alongside people who do not think like them, and how they must not try to force upon others their personal positions.

Paul quotes the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah in this Romans passage to illuminate that God has always intended for the Gentiles to be included in the promises of Israel; the nations of the world are to be brought into equal fellowship with the chosen people. Jews and Gentiles were meant to be together as a single family, despite their different backgrounds. It is through Israel, the root of Jesse that God would call people of every nation into the one family of salvation and praise.

Paul was excellent at diplomacy. The Gentiles are not to forget that it is through Israel that their promises by God were given, and the Jews are not to forget that God promised in their ancient Scriptures that inclusivity of all was part of the grand plan. Paul is appealing to both Jews and Gentiles that they are meant to come together despite their differences, they are called to live in harmony and welcome one another, in order to glorify the one, true God, in whom all are accepted and all belong.

In the Isaiah passage read today, we are given a picture of what this looks like, the scene of the peaceable kingdom. We read the passage in our Compassionate Kids group on Wednesday, and the children were asked what they noticed about the passage, where the wolf shall live with the lamb the leopard shall lie down with the baby goat, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. One child responded, "It seems like enemies are getting along."

Indeed, the passage is full of predators and prey living together harmoniously. One child shared that her father had encountered a mother bear with her cubs in Alaska, and he waved his poles in the air to appear big. The child's father told her, "You have to look big and be a threat, but not too much of a threat, or they'll attack you." Hmmmm. Sounds like some good peacemaking advice.

I think we are tempted, or, I know I am tempted, to think about how the aggressors - - wolf, the leopard, the lion and the bear named in the passage are the ones who have to tone it down, to change. Not attack. Eat something else. See the vulnerability of the lamb, the baby goat, the calf and the child. The lions and leopards are seen, next to the lamb and the calf, as the wicked ones.

But perhaps it is not only the predators that are transformed in the peaceable kingdom. There is something to the idea of the prey waving the poles in the air, making oneself bigger and seen, "but not too much," to avoid being attacked.

Filmmaker Cassie Jaye became a feminist when as a teenage actress she was exasperated of being continually cast as a vulnerable, objectified, ditzy female, and realized the roles resembled those she was expected to play in real life. At age 29, troubled by the high-profile rape cases reported in the media, she decided to make a film about men's issues. She was intrigued by how Men's Rights Activists groups had such large followings. She thought she was going to make a film about women haters, hoping not to get hurt while doing so.

What Cassie Jaye assumed was going to be a scandalous film about the underground movement of misogynists, turned out to be quite different than she expected. The title of the documentary, "The Red Pill," was inspired by the science fiction movie "The Matrix," in which taking the red pill means facing the painful truth. The truth she discovered in making the film was that polarization is not going to solve gender issues.

Jaye found in researching men's rights activists that they turned out to be compassionate, intelligent people in loving relationships. Their arguments made a great deal of sense, as she heard about male disadvantage: Men are more likely to die at work, become homeless, lose custody of their children, and work longer hours, receive significantly longer jail sentences and commit suicide. Men are less likely to go to college, to go to the doctor. She was introduced to the male point of view, which described men working ten-hour days in hard, unpleasant and often risky employment, carrying the lion's share for what it takes to run our society, feeling the weight of traditional obligation and feeling compelled to provide. And whether we acknowledge it or not, Jaye says, women expect them to provide. She says the idea that men invented the rules to benefit themselves simply doesn't hold up.

When it is suggested to Cassie that patriarchy did not create women's reproductive roles, but women's reproductive roles shaped patriarchy, she claims it makes a lot of

sense. She found that feminists believed the men's rights activists were trying to turn back the clock on women's rights and promote violence against women. What she found was that a lot of the feminists she talked to had never actually spoken to men's rights activists themselves.

As Cassie's feminist faith weakened, she tried to restore it, listening to mantras about female subordination, the lack of women in politics and the gender pay gap. But when she moved from the injustices of feminism to men's issues, she could not deny the pain there as well – the pain of being unable to see one's children, of being assumed to be the perpetrator, or of being persistently disbelieved.

Jaye became confused and frustrated as her own preconceived beliefs were challenged and changed, as she distanced herself from feminist beliefs. Though she states that she is a women's rights advocate, she no longer labels herself a feminist because she does not see it as the road to gender equality, as conducive to an environment to discuss gender issues and ultimately solutions, if men are being demonized.

And although Men's Rights and Feminism have interests in common – a belief in gender equality, shared childcare, flexible employment – the desired results cannot come from a movement which is based on the assumption that women are victims and men are bad.

To create peace, we must learn to stand up for our beliefs without annihilating those who disagree with us. We must allow all to come to the table and each to have a voice. Yes, the wolf must be tamed to live with the lamb, but what of the lamb? The lamb, perhaps, is gifted in the peaceable kingdom with bravery, courage and fearlessness. We must not fall prey to villainizing the other.

If we are going to live in peace with one another, there must be no demonizing.

At SFTS, The Center for Innovation in Ministry is adding to its website "A Fabulous Place." This is a blog that initially will invite people to share their voice without interruption or comment from others. When a comment is submitted it will be evaluated as safe or free from abuse or bullying. Eventually, they will allow registered users to interact more freely. In this space, no one will be asked to be silent, have their fears discounted, chided for not being balanced or told to calm down. Everyone will be heard.

At the most recent Presbytery meeting held at Westminster Woods last month, the topic was the enneagram, where participants were asked to take a questionnaire to determine their personality types. As the group gathered and divided into the 9 different types, we were asked questions about one another's perspectives, gaining insight into ourselves and others. We were made aware of each type's virtues and vices. Every personality has both virtues and vices.

The point of the enneagram is to learn about one another, to be able to see that people are coming from different points of view and perspectives, and to respect and support one another in our inherent differences. Some are naturally inclined to express anger directly, others deny anger, turning it on themselves. There are perfectionists, helpers, achievers, tragic romantics, intellectuals, questioners, fun-seekers, assertive leaders and peacemakers. It is like the 1st Corinthians passage of the different gifts; the body is comprised of the eye and the ear, the arm and the foot, many parts of which none are indispensable. We all have different gifts; we need each other. We learn from each other.

When we are shown the image of the peaceable kingdom, where the wolf lives with the lamb, we believe this to be possible. Believing in peace, gives us peace in believing.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. 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.