

SERMON: Thy Kingdom Come

TEXT: Isaiah 11:1-10

In the early 1800's, Edward Hicks worked as a painter of coaches and signs before he became a minister in the Religious Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. Though his work supported his ministry, it also put him at odds with Quaker values of simplicity and plainness. But he continued, moving from painting on coaches to painting on canvas. Beginning in 1820 and for the next 25 plus years, Hicks completed a series of 62 paintings, all under the title of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, and based in part on Isaiah 11:6-8. "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."

Imagine. 62 paintings all with the same vision of peace. Then again, maybe it's not so hard to believe when the vision never fully manifests into reality.

During the 1820s, a severe rift formed within the Society of Friends. Hicks represented this rift in one painting with a shattered tree trunk in the background and the predatory and domestic animals lying down together in the foreground.

Other paintings in the series included a background scene depicting the signing of a peace treaty between a Native American tribe and William Penn, a Quaker and the founder of Pennsylvania.

Even in a denomination like the Quakers with a history of opposition to war, peace is fleeting, and has to be reimagined over and over again.

The Peaceable Kingdom is God's kingdom. And God's kingdom is coming.

Isaiah described the one who would usher in the kingdom as a shoot that would come out from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots. I have to confess, I never really took the time to understand this imagery until preparing for this sermon. Perhaps you've heard of the Jesse Tree. It is the family tree of Jesus, going all the way back to Jesse, the father of King David.

But the family tree seems to be falling. A righteous ruler like King David is needed, but the branches are bare, and there is little hope for another king within that family tree. Yet if we bring our focus back to the trunk of the tree and down to its base, we will see that a new branch is sprouting. The shoot from the stump of Jesse is the Messiah. Long after Isaiah's time it becomes clear that the long-awaited king is Jesus.

Isaiah describes him like this: "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."

One commentary noted, "The royal family tree is finished, yet from its stump he nonetheless appears - and is unlike all others. Our kings and executives are not possessed of these depths of reverence, wisdom, righteousness, and effectiveness in righting the world. Such a ruler does not evolve from among us. This is a new and miraculous sovereign presence, stepping forward from the mystery of God." (Paul Simpson Duke, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 1)

"With or without us, God will accomplish a new creation. Having raised up the righteous leader, the Creator will make a

new paradise of the earth. Enter the animals. Imagine – baby goats are best friends with grizzlies; a lamb and a wolf enjoy conversing over a breakfast of clover.... A thoroughly healed creation is imagined, nothing less than Eden remade.” (Paul Simpson

Duke, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 1)

It’s beautiful, isn’t it? A healed creation. A new paradise. It is the stuff of dreams, and it sounds too good to be true. And perhaps it is. For when we turn to the Gospel of Matthew and read what John the Baptist said about the coming kingdom, the picture is quite different.

Let’s hear it again from the Gospel of Matthew: “But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, [John] said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 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. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the

trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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.”

THY KINGDOM COME. We are in a time when we are awaiting God’s kingdom. But is it a peaceful paradise like Isaiah describes or a time of wrath and judgment as John the Baptist warns? Looking at these two scriptures side by side serves as a wake-up call for us. It wakes us up to our calling from God, if you will. It is a stark reminder that, in the words of Martin Luther King, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”

We tend to imagine that peace comes as we gaze at the newborn baby sleeping soundly in his mother’s arms, pondering

the miracle of new life and unconditional love. But we forget that the baby will wake up and begin to cry, hungry and in need. Only then do we realize that peace requires our full attention. Peace is hard work.

Peace requires justice. And justice calls for us to listen to the cries of others. To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love the unlovable. Justice calls for us to nurture and care for one another as we would care for God's own child. Putting her needs ahead of our own desires. Helping him to grow strong.

God's beautiful kingdom of peace is not only our hope, but a goal for all of us to work toward. Peace must be pursued. Created. Nurtured. Achieved. Peace calls for us to bear good fruit. In all our relationships. In all situations. Wherever we go. Whatever we do. We must always be imagining what peace would look like. And then, like the artist, painting it, bringing it to life, demonstrating how it plays out.

In recent years and among many theologians, the word "kingdom" has been given a new spelling. Leaving out the letter "g" the word becomes kin-dom. And it takes on a whole new meaning. Now, the kingdom of God is not the creation of the one who rules over us. It is not something we wait to have bestowed upon us.

Instead, kin-dom is all God's people. Working together. In relationship with one another. We are the children of God. We are "kin" to one another. And we are called to create and nurture a beloved community where everyone belongs, everyone is loved, everyone takes part, and everyone is important.

Looking back, I now wonder whether it was just a childish mistake or a prophetic pronouncement when my four-year-old son prayed the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, *then I will be done.*"

We are not simply waiting and hoping for peace during this Advent season. We all play a part in bringing peace to life. THY KIN-DOM COME... to the glory of God!

AMEN.