

**Patrick Yancey**

**12/8/2019**

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

**Matthew 3:1-12**

**“Let There be Peace on Earth”**

## **Opening**

- Isaiah’s vision of the coming Messiah, in today’s lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures speaks deeply to the longings of the human heart.
  - In this season, when the stores are filled with music about peace on earth, we long for a peace that we rarely see.
  - And Isaiah pushes our imaginations to the limit, using the images of wild animals to illustrate the ultimate in peacefulness.
    - The wolf shall live with the lamb, his vision proclaims. It’s surely not the world as we know it, where wolves are a battleground between sheep farmers who want to protect their flocks and naturalists who want to protect wolves from extinction.
    - All through the passage predators are coupled with their prey, but in Isaiah’s vision they live in peace.
    - Some even change their eating habits—lions eating straw like oxen.
- What Isaiah is saying is that the only way such peace can be possible is for the animals to change their very natures.
  - In that peaceful world, snakes cannot attack helpless children who play around their dens.
  - Leopards and bears lie down with kids and cattle.
  - Peace in God’s Holy Mountain will come when no creatures hurt or destroy others.
- What could bring about this miraculous vision?
  - It will come, Isaiah says, when the earth is as full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters that cover the sea.
  - Now, most of us probably have trouble believing that wild animals can or will ever change their very natures.
    - Afterall they are made to be carnivores and predators. In fact, their lives depend on it.
  - The truth is Isaiah was not so naïve as to believe that these wild animals will ever change their nature.
  - Isaiah was really talking about the one created animal that can choose to change its nature—the human animal.
  - As far as we know, only humans are blessed with memory and reason, and with that memory and reason, people have free will, limited by circumstances, to be sure, but real just the same.

- Unlike other animals, people can choose to be as full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.
  - And when they make that choice, they are choosing to work toward the peace that Isaiah envisioned.

### **Choosing a Different Kind of Life**

- Isaiah's vision calls us to be people who choose to live a different kind of life.
  - We heard a similar call from a later prophet, John the Baptist, in today's New Testament reading from the Gospel of Matthew.
    - John called on people to be ready for the coming kingdom of heaven by repenting of their sins and becoming bearers of fruit worthy to be part of the Messiah's kingdom.
    - And in his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul longs for God's gifts of steadfastness and encouragement, so that people can live in harmony with one another.
- All of these visions require the peoples of the earth to lay aside their predatory ways and to choose to be a new kind of people, who truly carry out the vision of God in creation.
- In this sense, the little child born in Bethlehem shall truly lead them, to be a sign to all peoples that a new way is possible.

### **Talk About Peace**

- It's hard to talk about peace when we are at war and as we examine the conflicts around the globe, and our nation's role in them, it becomes clearer to see that we in this country are at war.
  - But that is precisely when we need to talk about peace the most.
  - Every time we have war, it makes us realize all the more why we desperately need to work for peace.
    - To establish a lasting peace based on equity and justice.
    - A peace that will prevent war by eliminating its causes.

### **Choosing Peace**

- We need to choose peace.
  - And we need to be the model for peace to those around us, especially for our younger generations.
  - We can't afford to let our young decide that violence is the way to go. We can't let them choose violence.
  - We need to help our young people understand that from a political standpoint, for survival, military action may at times be a necessary and appropriate response.
    - But we need to make the distinction between political justification and religious and moral justification.
  - At the very best, the very best, war is morally neutral.

- And don't let anyone try to tell you that they can find anything in what Jesus said or taught that would justify war or violence or retaliation of any kind. It isn't there folks.
- Now, let me quickly add that I'm not criticizing people (us) for choosing violence, and I'm certainly not condemning.
  - Violence is of the world: people live in the world, they have to make their way in the world, and sometimes violence becomes a choice and at times it may seem like the only choice.
    - But we need to remind ourselves that the Palestinians, the people living along the Saudi-Yemini border, the people of Syria, the people in the streets, are simply making their way in the world, too.
    - We can't deny them the same choice that we make.
    - If violence is an option for us, it is an option for them, too.
    - And who are we to proclaim that there is a "nice" violence, a politically correct violence?
      - Violence is violence.
      - Is one form more justified than another and if so, by whose standards? Political? Moral? Religious?
- It's just important that we recognize that violence begets violence, and that ultimately it becomes an accepted norm.
  - Right now, we live in a culture which glorifies violence, not peace.
    - We see that in our movies, in our music and on television.
    - We need to make the effort for peace even while we are involved in violence.
    - We may not be able to destroy evil, but we can and we need to replace it with good.
    - We cannot just win the war, we need to win the peace, too.
- We need to wage peace at the same time we wage war.
  - Sure, it's important to feed and clothe and house refugees of war, and we're helping to do that.
    - But it's not enough.
    - We need to work to discover and understand the root causes of aggression and violence, and especially our own complicity, and work to eliminate those just as vigorously as we wage war.
    - We need to honestly assess our contributions to the causes of conflict and get rid of them.

### **McArthur and Marshall**

- Two of our greatest military heroes of World War II illustrate this point because they recognized the need to wage peace, as well as war.
  - General Douglas MacArthur led the very important and successful effort to rebuild Japan and the Japanese economy after the War was over.

- He saw the importance of efforts to build a lasting peace, and his efforts towards peace were just as successful as his war efforts.
- General George Marshall had the foresight to develop a plan for the rebuilding of war-devastated Europe—one that included our enemies, as well as our allies.
- The effects of war, of violence of any kind, are devastating.
  - You can't miss this if you look into the faces of Syrian refugees as they desperately flee the violence in their country; and the Kurdish children, cold and hungry, without adequate food or shelter.
- And there are those who will say, "Well, we can't help that. They started it."
  - And they may well have started it.
  - But that doesn't excuse us from seeing the horror of war, no matter whose fault it is.
  - And the worst part of it is that for those little children who go to school, many of them are exposed to and are learning terrorism.
- There are no winners or losers in war or violence, there are only victims.
  - Some of the victims are heroes; others are just innocent bystanders.
  - But they all suffer the consequences of conflict.
  - This weekend marks the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor and as I watched the televised tributes to the survivors and heard them recount their stories, the one thing I saw that they have in common is tears.
    - Tears of remembrance.
    - Tears of loss.
    - Tears of pain and anguish.

## **Peace No Matter What**

- Isaiah persisted in his vision of lasting peace, God's shalom, despite the devastation and deprivation that surrounded him.
  - We too need to embrace a similar vision of peace and hold fast to it no matter what we may encounter.
- It's easy to embrace peace when things are going well- when things are going our way.
  - But when someone intrudes into our territory, watch out!
  - Jesus didn't say, "Love your friends."
    - That was too easy to do, he said.
    - Even the hypocrites do that.
  - No, Jesus said, "love your enemies."
    - Not when it's convenient, not when things are going your way, not when you feel like it.
    - Just "love your enemies," he said.
  - Isaiah envisioned a peace resulting from that kind of leadership- the kind of leadership that understands the causes of conflict and addressed them.

- And Isaiah is telling us that this kind of leadership is a choice we make.

## **Peace is possible**

- Now many of us hear the words from the prophets, think “that’s nice” and let them roll right by us.
  - After all, how can we do anything important toward bringing peace on earth?
  - Let the leaders of the world’s nations lay aside their predatory ways.
    - Let them become the kind of leaders who can make peace happen.
  - Yet it’s interesting. When Jesus and John came with their messages of change, they were not addressed to the leaders of the nations any more than to every single individual.
- The beginnings of a peaceful world are actually very small.
  - As small as twelve disciples who chose to leave their old ways and follow the man of peace, who came into the world helplessness as a baby in a manger.
  - As small as a friendly smile to the tired clerk at the cash register.
  - As small as the choice to not do battle for position in a line of traffic.
  - As small as the continuing choice to be people of peace and to welcome all whom we meet in this hurried season of Advent and in the days beyond.
  - As simple as listening to God’s spirit and discovering the life-saving joy of God’s peace and unconditional love.
- There is a song written in 1955 by actress and singer Jill Jackson-Miller that captures the essence of Isaiah’s prophesy.
  - Let peace begin with me  
Let this be the moment now.  
With every step I take  
Let this be my solemn vow  
To take each moment and live  
Each moment in peace eternally  
Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me
- May this be so for all of us during this Advent season.
  - And through all the days of our lives.
  - Amen