

Isaiah 11:1-10

Matthew 3:1-12

Romans 15:4-13

“Blessed are you, Lord God, the God of Israel;
you alone do wonderful deeds!” AMEN!

“I don’t like spiders and snakes.
And that ain’t what it takes to love me.
You fool, you fool.”

A blast from the past, they say!

Songwriters David Bellamy and Jim Stafford
with a comical song about a boy and girl.

The one knows what she wants and
the other is too afraid to go there. :-)

My reference to this song doesn’t pertain
to their human relationship or antics.

No, no, I sing today for the recognition of
my fear of spiders and snakes! :-)

Not everyone shares the phobia
I’m talking about but most do.

And it is because of that fear,
that we find the images in Isaiah chapter 11
to be so compelling:

wolf with lamb,
leopard with the baby goat,

calf, lion and cow lounging around together,
nursing child playing over the hole of the asp,
toddler fishing the hand around
the adder's den.

Wow!

Isn't it life-giving to look at this account in Isaiah,
on the second week of Advent, and
find the sense of hope about a time of peace.

Peace and new potentials to encounter
restored relationships with former enemies.

God, speaking through Isaiah, invites us
to reimagine what we once assumed dangerous.

Not only the violence between humans and snakes...
but the violence that happens between animals.

And if animals, then too,
the violence between people.

The peace that is coming will be cosmic in magnitude.

For human beings, and

for all of God's creation.

What a vision of peace;
what a proclamation of what is to come. (Pause)

Yet, these words of visionary peace and
reformed relationships to come - only
make sense when we take into account
Isaiah's proclamation in chapter 10.

“The eleventh century French sage,
Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (“Rashi” for short)
insists that we read the promises of Isaiah 11
in light of the words in chapter 10.”

For, in chapter 10, we find God allowing
the destruction of Judah at the murderous
hands of the Assyrian Empire.

God allowed destruction, pain, and
a time of enslavement to come to God's people,
according to the Bible.

Why would God allow that to happen?
Well, that answer is in chapter 10, too.
There, God-through-Isaiah declared
to the people - why
they were being judged.

And the declaration in Isaiah chapter 10, just
might be for our ears, too.

“Watch-out to those who enact unjust laws
And to those who constantly make
harmful decisions that deprive
the needy of justice

And (watch-out) those who rob the poor
of their basic rights, so that widows may
be their reward and that they
may take orphans with violence.”

Commentator Cory Driver wrote how
“bad governance supported the rich
and powerful,” making them more wealthy
and more powerful.

It was all done at the “expense of the already
poor and marginalized.”

The very ones in God’s beloved community.

So, it was for these things that God condemned
and labeled the Israelites as a “godless people.”

Yet, it is not permission for us to
be all high-and-mighty and shake our heads
at the Israelites.

God's proclamation was not a condemnation
just for one group of people but for all of us,
should we too enact unjust laws,
and deprive the needy of due justice.

If God will allow the Assyrians to destroy
a kingdom built on injustice and idolatry
back then, then it is not too hard to believe
that God will allow destruction of a
"kingdom" in the present age, too.

It shouldn't be hard to believe that
selfish society's inevitably devour themselves. (2X)

But then God also promised that the Assyrians
would NOT go unpunished for their
destruction and plunder of lives.

To those who hurt others,
God will bring hurt...

The devourers of our day will also
be crushed and destroyed.

(Sigh) There is a lot of violence and retribution and
revenge and destruction around these texts
in our Advent week of Peace. (Pause)

The vision of peace and proclamation of what
is to come is therefore a formative reality.

Something is at work in, around, among us
giving shape to something else. (Pause)

If you've walked a forest after a devastating fire,
then you may know the joy in seeing
a new sprout of green coming to life
out of the ashes.

If you've watched caterpillar build a chrysalis
and die for 10 days, and saw it break open
with new life and fly away,
then you have tasted a vision of peace.

As Pastor Joe taught last week in the
message of Hope.

We recall Peace with who we are,
whose we are and
where we are.

We are in the wilderness and John the baptizer
is preaching to us, all of us.

And we look for God, but do not want
to listen to prophets, we'd rather silence them -
or kill them.

John's truth-telling is too hard on entitled ears.

We preachers often apologize for him and
his strangeness of dress and diet.

We find excuses for his words of division
by saying it's about them... not us.

Or we take his message and tell people
of a vengeful God with a strange hope of
changing them.

Thus we continue in the wilderness, and
this second week of Advent begins our
begging of a question:

Why would God send a Messiah, in the first place?

I don't mean a baby in a manger, but a repairer.

Why would God keep at repairing us? (Pause)

Who here likes to take thing apart and
examine the way things work? I sure do!

(Talk about past work of demolition)

It as easier to demolish, and more difficult

to put it all back together.

John the baptizer prepares us for the repairer.

For the One who promises to put us all back together.

We are brought to see the ugly
truths about all of us.

The ugly truths about us need to be dismantled
and laid bare right away.

But we must be put back together, again. (Pause)

Back then John was not baptizing to make people
to feel bad - or good - about themselves.

He was enlisting people in a cause.

He was doing his part in repairing the broken.

He's telling you, and me, that it is time
to have the heart to take a stand and
follow the way of Jesus.

There will always be something to be afraid of...
be it spiders and snakes or failure or disrespect
or being laughed at or even shunned...

so we need this place (this Holy Ground)
to discover the process of
Divine repair and holy
welcome and re-ignited
hearts. (Pause)

The truth is, we really need Advent to be
longer than just four weeks...

Not because we need more shopping time! :-)

We need more Advent time because there is
much to repair in our world, but God
promises to not let things stay the way
they are.

God promises to repair!

Let us be part of that good news!

Let us tell of peace and prepare a way...
A Jesus Way!

For God's word is never broken.

AMEN!