

**Isaiah 11: 1-10**

**December 4, 2016**

**“The Tale of the Wolf and the Lamb”**

***“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.”***

Our Advent journey invites us to tarry here for a moment and to ponder this rather idyllic vision of peace. A wolf and a lamb, a leopard and a goat, a calf and a lion all lying contentedly together with a little child in their midst. The prey and the predator together in peace. The bully and the bullied sharing a cup of tea. The oppressed and the oppressor sitting down together for a feast. It is a strange dream. It is a dream that is both comforting and yet also disturbing. It is disturbing because it challenges how we see our world. A leopard eats a goat. They don't share a cup of tea.

When I lived in California I sometimes visited the Monterey Bay Aquarium near San Francisco. It was an amazing place. In the centre of the aquarium was this huge circular glass tank full of all these amazing fish and ocean creatures. I loved just sitting and watching them play. It was a fascinating way to enjoy an afternoon.

Some of the fish in that tank were natural predators. I often wondered why you did not see them eating each other. It was in some ways a perfect illustration of Isaiah's vision of the prey and the predator sharing a cup of tea.

I asked a guide once how they kept peace in the aquarium. She said; "The answer is very simple. They feed the fish enough food that they don't have to eat each other." I have often wondered whether we could solve the violence in our own world in much the same way. What if we all had enough to eat, would we stop killing each other?

The world into which Isaiah prophesied was a violent one. Judah and Israel seemed to constantly be at war with someone. They had

occasionally been the predator, but for most of their history they had been the prey. As a people, they knew what it meant to be the oppressed and the victim. Therefore, this vision of peace, of an end of violence and of a return to the prosperity of King David and King Solomon (the root of Jesse) was a powerfully compelling one.

The essential message of this vision is that if you are going to dream, then dream big. Isaiah dreamed of a time when there would be peace among the nations and in the animal kingdom. Isaiah's vision would have resonated deeply with his hearers. It is a dream that would still resonate deeply with many living in the Middle East today. I imagine the people of Aleppo might also resonate with this vision.

However, it might not completely speak to us. So, I invite us to consider for a moment this morning what big dream might resonate with us gathered here in the relative peace and prosperity of North America. What predators and prey might we hope to see lie down

together in peace? What oppressor and oppressed in our world would we hope to see share a cup of tea?

If I were to dream big, in the manner of the prophet Isaiah, then I too would dream of a world without violence. I too would dream of a world where the wolf and the lamb, the prey and the predator, the leopard and the goat, the bully and the bullied, the cow and the lamb, the oppressed and the oppressor would find peace.

This season of Advent invites us to prayerfully wonder for a moment what big dreams God might still want us to embrace for this world of ours. So, if I were to dream big, I would dream of a world where women could be safe in their own homes. I would dream of a world where women did not have to be afraid of where they went or what they did. I would dream of a world where there were no bullies. Where transgendered children could find their voice, and learn to sing their song with boldness. I would dream of world where everyone could have access to enough food and resources to not only survive but

thrive. I would dream of a world where every had a safe and warm place to lay their head at night. I would dream of a world where First Nations and non-First Nations people could live in right relations; could share a cup of tea. I would dream of a world where forgiveness and reconciliation were the norm and not the exception. I would dream of a world where all children had access to safe schools and clean water. I would dream of a world where suicide would not be an attractive alternative for a teenager.

This week I spoke with two dads. Both men had sons who were struggling with addiction issues. One son after a hard week of work at his new job went to a party. He took a drug that almost killed him instantly. He survived, but he has lost the use of one of his arms. The arm he needs for his new job. He may eventually recover. The doctors don't know. The other son is a successful commodities trader living abroad. He has a beautiful wife and a healthy new born son. To stay on top of his game he needed a little help and he found it in a white

powder. Now, he finds himself living with a serious addiction to cocaine that threatens to pull the castle down. As I listened to these two dads share with me their broken hearts for their sons, I dreamed of a world where kids don't become addicted, where kids don't take drugs that can potentially kill them the first time they use them and that our kids find ways to cope with the stresses of their lives in life-giving ways.

The prophet Isaiah comes to us today and invite us to dream big about the possibility of peace in our world. What enemies would we like to see sit down together and share a cup of tea. Let us dream big and then let those dreams inspire us into action.

There is yet another way to look at the lamb living with the wolf together in peace. What if the wolf and the lamb are found in the same person? What if there is a little lamb and a little wolf in each of us? Then this passage becomes an invitation to come to terms with our own power and our own powerlessness. It becomes an invitation for us to have tea with our inner bully and our inner victim. They are there in

all of us. From this perspective, this passage invites us to wrestle with how we are both the oppressor and the oppressed. It becomes an invitation to find peace within ourselves, to come to a place of acceptance of our both our beauty and our brokenness. If, I were to dream big, then I would also dream of finding some inner peace between my inner lion and my inner calf. I believe world peace will only come when each of us find our own personal peace within.

Let me conclude with a tale an elder once taught me. May the tale provide us with a hint as to how we might find a way to make our big dreams about enemies having tea a reality, particularly the enemies that live within us:

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. “One is Evil – It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good – It is joy, peace,

love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

As we continue our journey through this season of Advent, let us dream big about peace in our world and let us feed that dream within us. **Amen.**