

**“The Endangered Lamb – A Word of Peace”
Isaiah 11:1-9**

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The lamb has become a metaphor for Christ through the initial proclamation of John the Baptist.

When Jesus stepped into the public arena, John proclaimed, **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)**

Last week, we considered the implications of those words being a reference back to the Passover Lamb, an almost certain imagery that the 1st century Jews would have shared.

The Passover Lamb brought us the word of hope.

Today, we come to the word of peace. I struggle with this one because I believe in the necessity of this characteristic so passionately, yet it seems to be the most evasive of the Advent qualities of hope, peace, joy, and love.

We all experience glimmers of hope. Hope gets us out of bed in the mornings.

We all have momentary expressions of joy, even if they seem trivial and manufactured.

We comprehend love, at least on some level.

But peace, we have such a hard time with peace. The world does not have peace.

Our nation is not at peace. Our streets are not at peace.

Our families are not at peace. We are not even at peace within ourselves.

I labor with this idea of peace because I believe so strongly that it is God’s great desire for His children to live at peace, and yet it is so evasive.

The metaphor of the lamb continues today. Today, we consider the endangered lamb, the lamb of peace.

Most of us have seen this Isaiah text in art, the lamb resting with the lion. The image itself conjures the idea of peace.

But what a bizarre picture; everything about the Isaiah passage is contrary to the norm.

The wolf and the lamb are living together. We know that to be ridiculous, but even Jesus recognized the unlikelihood when He warned against false prophets, **“They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15).**

Wolves are the antithesis of sheep.

But Isaiah writes that peace is like: **“The wolf will live with the lamb” (Isaiah 11:6).**

Is peace truly that far-fetched?

The prophet goes on to say, **“The leopard will lie down with the goat” (Isaiah 11:6).**

To get the full impression, you need to know that the “goat” is actually “a kid, a young goat.”

Hunter is lying down within the helpless hunted.

“The calf and the lion and the yearling together” (Isaiah 11:6).

The word for “yearling,” or “fatted calf,” can also mean “well-fed.” Isaiah may be saying that the calf and the lion eat well together.

The scene of “National Geographic” specials showing how the lion stakes out and guards its prey makes this vision hard to imagine.

These word pictures are images of God’s creation existing together in harmony. But the most striking illustration is still to come.

“And a little child will lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

This little child will even play near the poisonous snakes.

What kind of world places a little child near lions, leopards, wolves, and snakes?

I am not promoting snake handling, so let’s look at the context in which Isaiah writes!

This is prophetic material, based on a time in the future when the shoot which comes from the stump of Jesse will bring God’s presence into the world.

The reference to the shoot from the stump of Jesse is a reference to someone who will come from the lineage of Jesse.

Your biblical history reminds you that Jesse is the father of King David and thus the ancestral line of Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the shoot that grows out of the stump of Jesse.

Isaiah is writing of kingdom behavior. When the shoot of Jesse returns to judge the world, there will be peace, even among the worst of enemies.

There is a sermon: some of us better start getting along now because we are going to spend eternity together!

However, we cannot dismiss these symbols of peace as merely for another day. We cannot settle with our warring spirit by relegating the peace of the wolf and the lamb to another day.

We cannot find comfort in the idea that leopards and goats will get along later, and calves and lions will eat side by side at heaven’s table.

To say that the child will lead this parade of peace only in the kingdom is to say that today has not purpose.

The word of peace from Isaiah is supposed to call us to something now. Even though this scene is a picture of peace one day, there is still a word for us today.

You and I are called to be living examples of that peace now. It has never been enough for Christians to say that something is only for a later age or dispensation in the Kingdom.

When Jesus taught us to pray, **“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”** He was teaching us that we are to be portraits of the Kingdom life here on earth.

That example includes being people of peace now, where we are.

The most striking part of this Isaiah passage for me is that right in the middle of it all is a child.

The Child is why the Christmas story is so compelling and confusing to many of us as well.

God came to earth as a Child. Almighty God entered the world as an innocent and vulnerable baby, thrown to the wolves, leopards, lions, and snakes who roamed the halls of the religious buildings and who walked the streets of the villages and towns.

We accept His birth as a Child, but the message of peace calls us to do something to make this world fit for Him.

They say that Christmas is for children. It really is.

It is for children of all ages. All of us are called to do our part to create a world this Christmas where a child, where the Child, is welcome.

How do we fulfill our role to bring peace at Christmas? Look at the children.

Watch the children and learn. **“And a little child will lead them.”**

Peace is found in the eyes of the child at Christmastime.

The child looks with wonder.

Peace comes when we can look at the world with wonder again, just as a child looks at Christmas with wonder.

To look at Christmas with wonder is to imagine how big Santa Claus can fit through the chimney, how Rudolph can guide the sleigh all the way around the world with only a red nose, how the presents always arrive after we fall asleep, and never before.

It is the strange wonderment of Christmas.

We adults do just as many outlandish things this time of year. We decorate our houses with twinkling lights, Christmas trees, and stuff everywhere; and we believe it looks good because it is Christmas!

Yet, within a few days after Christmas, lights on the outside of the house mean that whoever lives there doesn't care!

We cannot even see the television in home for the Christmas tree that we put in the way!

We do odd things at Christmas. Our homes are a picture of wonder.

My son was going to a Christmas party where all the college kids were supposed to wear the tackiest Christmas clothes they could find.

So, he called to ask if we could send him one of our sweaters!

We wear odd apparel at Christmas. Our clothes are a picture of wonder.

Given the strange behavior at this time of year already, why can't we take things one step further?

Why can't we live in the wonderment of peace, where people get along?

To find peace, we must return to a child's kind of wonder. It is the place where people let go of some of our normal behavior, like possessiveness, pride, territorialism, ego, and we live in peace.

Peace is a picture of wonder.

Isaiah talks about lambs taking naps with lions, and children leading the way.

Yet, the world we live in is filled with news of violence and hatred. I received a prayer request this week for a Baptist pastor in Turkey whose name is on a death list, apparently because he hosted a funeral service for a Christian who was killed in April.¹

The only way to peace is to start looking at the world with a child's Christmas view of wonder where things don't always make sense and are not always in our control.

Here is the problem. You and I like things the way we can control them.

We like things to be the way they have always been and the way that makes sense to us. I think that we would rather be in control and at war than out of control and at peace.

Wonder is just the opposite. Wonder pulls us out of our comfort zones, perhaps kicking and screaming, into a place that we cannot figure out.

That is the place of peace.

I was able to do that during the Singing Christmas Tree. I stopped worrying about the kids at the top of the scaffolding.

I stopped looking for anyone who might appear to be getting tired of standing. I didn't think about David on the sound or Phil on the lights.

I didn't watch the people's reactions in the pews in front of me.

Instead, I opened my heart to the words "worthy is the Lamb."

That was worship. I sat and wondered.

The child looks with innocence.

Peace comes when we look at the world through the eyes of innocence, as a child looks at Christmas with innocence.

One of our traditions as a family was to drive around on Christmas Eve and look at Christmas tree lights, listening to Christmas carols on the radio.

I was innocent enough to believe that the peacefulness of the setting on the outside represented the peacefulness of the homes on the inside.

In the Isaiah passage, there is an odd innocence in the lamb who does not believe the lion will harm him, or in the goat who does not believe that the leopard will attack.

There is innocence in the child who leads them all.

¹ See <http://www.bwanet.org/default.aspx?pid=732>

Peace comes when we learn to have that same kind of innocence. Before you dismiss this idea as being silly, irrelevant, and unpractical, hear me out.

Innocence is at the heart of the Christian faith.

Innocence means that we learn to believe that we are forgiven.

Since none of us is truly innocent in the sense of being perfect, the only way to experience innocence is by accepting our forgiveness.

At the heart of what we believe is that through acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God has declared us innocent.

However, very few of us are actually willing to accept forgiveness, and the reason may surprise you.

To accept forgiveness is to submit to the power of the forgiver. We give up control when we accept someone's forgiveness.

To accept God's forgiveness means that we have given up power to Him. We don't like to do that.

Peace is going to take some innocence. Peace demands that we submit to God's forgiveness and work hard at a purity of our souls.

The child looks with trust.

Peace comes when we look at the world through the eyes of trust, as a child looks at Christmas with trust.

Who in the world would allow the scene that Isaiah paints to occur? It is a picture filled with too much trust.

One of my favorite scenes of trust occurs in a miracle that Jesus performed. The amazing feat of the miracle usually overshadows the huge act of trust that preceded it.

Thousands of people had gathered around Jesus to hear Him preach. When it got late in the day, the crowd became hungry, and no one seemed prepared to feed such a massive group.

You know that Jesus multiplied a boy's small lunch to feed 5,000 people, with enough to have a basket of food left over for each disciple.

The act of trust occurred when the little boy gave up his own food. We might have done the same, but wouldn't most of us have kept a fish or two for ourselves?

It was a child's lunch that provided the resource for the miracle because an adult would not have trusted enough to give his lunch away!

Only a child would trust Jesus like that.

The Kingdom belongs to children such as these, children with trust.

We are going to need to develop a sense of trust before we are ever going to have peace. We have to trust others, and we have to give people a reason to trust us.

That is the message of peace:
One wolf and one lamb;
one leopard and one goat;
one calf and one lion;
one cow and one bear;
and one child.

One person with wonder, innocence, and trust. Peace?