

December 18, 2016

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Scripture

Isaiah 11:1-9

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The 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.

³His 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;

⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶The 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.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

Devotional

Oh, the peaceable kingdom—wolves and lambs, calves and lions—I always loved the harmony suggested by the image! And it lends itself to a great art project when you're doing children's church.

But look more closely—this isn't just a matter of enemies all just getting along or opponents crossing a theological divide. There's a big power differential reflected in these pairings; wolves eat lambs, not the other way around. Lions hunt calves. The peace that will be brought by the Lord is one in which those who are in positions of power and privilege no longer pose a threat to the weak and oppressed.

Indeed, the option of the Lord is for the lamb and the calf, the poor and the meek—the Lord, who will come as a shoot, a tender stem, an infant, opts for fragile life that is easily bruised and trodden. The God of mercy comes to us as one most in need of mercy and gentleness.

Who are the lambs among us today? The calves? Who needs the protection and care of those of us with some measure of power or privilege, whether it comes from what we have or who we are? Matthew 25 gives us a clue—those who are hungry, sick, lonely, poor, imprisoned. Children, elderly, refugees. Those on the margins. When we protect and cherish them, then, says Isaiah, “earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Prayer

God, we await the feast of your coming! And we wonder at the knowledge that you came as a baby, a displaced person, born to parents of no means or status. Attune our hearts and hands to those who mirror your incarnation among us, that we might know the righteousness that comes when we embrace them with equity and compassion. In this way will we best prepare ourselves for your arrival. Amen.