

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 11:1–10

Sermon: “His Gift of Peace Is Ours”

For many, our text from Isaiah conjures up a very clear image. We can just see a wolf and lamb playing with each other, a lion grazing contentedly, a baby laughing near the hole of a cobra. Such a strange, enchanting picture of nature at peace may have been in your children’s Bible or hung in your childhood bedroom. How many nurseries are adorned with an artist’s rendering of how “the lion will lie down with the lamb”!

Because of the association with these romantic illustrations from our youth, the Old Testament Reading today may come across more like a fable, a sweet but ultimately mythical description of the way life really is or ever will be. But far from it! In beautiful, vivid, memorable picture language, God is giving us here a very real promise about both Jesus’ coming and the salvation he brings. In Christ, the Kingdom of Peace Isaiah pictured is here and now.

As with so much of Isaiah’s poetry, the key is context. If we understand the surrounding verses, we’ll better understand what Isaiah is pointing to when he tells of vegetarian lions and domesticated bears.

In the very first verse, Isaiah says that *“there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse”* (v 1). What is this but a prophecy of Jesus’ line of descent and birth? When Jesus was born, the line of Jesse, King David’s father, had been reduced to a stump. The Davidic monarchy had been routed and kept down by the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Yet, *“Lo, how a rose e’er blooming From tender stem hath sprung! Of Jesse’s lineage coming As prophets long have sung”* (LSB 359:1).

On this same Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord rests. Isaiah writes, *“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”* (v 2). Jesus, the Son of David, went forth *“full of the Spirit”* and manifested himself before all Israel. At his Baptism, the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove and came to rest on him.

On Jesus rests the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. During his humble ministry, he demonstrated a wisdom which had been hidden from the beginning of the world; he spoke and gave insight into heavenly things which only he knows (John 8:14).

On Jesus rests the Spirit of counsel and might. By his suffering and death, David's Son, the King of Israel, loosed the bonds which held us captive and overcame the enemies of humanity sin, death, and the devil.

And on Jesus rests the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He was obedient to his Father's will, even unto death, to lead the lost children of the world back to God. Now through the Spirit, the Lord plants the knowledge of God, true love and true fear of God, into our hearts.

His work completed; the Son of David now sits on the throne of his Father.

“And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins” (vs 3–5).

Christ bears the scepter of peace, not judging by what his eyes see or deciding disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness judging the poor, deciding with equity in the interests of the meek. To troubled sinners, Christ gives justice.

He makes poor, miserable sinners right with God by covering their sin and presenting them blameless to God the Father.

At the same time, the godless, those who reject the scepter of this king, who reject his peace and grace, are put to shame. They behold him glorified but receive the punishment due their rejection of him. Again, as Isaiah puts it, ***“He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked”*** (v 4).

This, in short, is what the first five verses are all about. Some 750 years before the fact, Isaiah foretells the coming of Jesus, the King of peace. What Isaiah now goes on to describe is the kingdom of peace, the domain that Jesus will rule.

We read at the end of the passage that the root of Jesus will stand as a signal for the peoples (v 10). The nations shall inquire of him, and his resting place will be glorious. And here is the wonderful surprise for us: This holy time has already come! Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, has come. His name and his cross have been set up as a signal on the earth. It is visible everywhere. Those near and far have salvation and peace preached to them. The nations, sinners from all over the earth, acknowledge it.

They confess that in no other is salvation to be found, that no other name under heaven is given among men by which they must be saved. They come and kneel before the crucified Christ.

Now not all believe. This same Christ is also a sign that is spoken against, as Simeon foretold in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:34). Christ has been appointed for the fall of many. But many also come from all peoples and lands. There are always new flocks who stream to the signal on the mountain, to the manger in Bethlehem, to the cross at Golgotha, new flocks who find peace and rest for their souls. They inquire after the one who has redeemed them. And as the waters cover the sea, so numerous are they who acknowledge the Lord and serve him.

And now watch what this entails for the community that trusts in Jesus.

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy

mountain” (vs 6–9).

In the kingdom of Christ, there is no malice. Those who acknowledge the Lord renounce the works of the devil. And although we sinners still sin, there remains an ever-flowing fountain of mercy. Day to day, we receive from Christ grace, as well as peace and strength for all good works.

This then is what Isaiah means when he says the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and so on. The prophet is painting a picture of paradise. Wolves, lions, and bears dwelling alongside lambs, calves, and young goats. The wild animals not feeding on flesh and blood but instead going into pasture and eating straw like the oxen, no longer feral and ferocious but tame.

This is no fairy tale. Nor is it primarily a description of what life will finally be like in heaven. No, this is the kingdom of grace in which we live now! This is what the Church of Christ, even now being assembled from out of all the nations, looks like now! These scenes from the natural world are a metaphor, an allegory, for the peace that the Christian Church enjoys this very moment.

A peace in sharp contrast to the world's lack of peace, its continual conflict and war, where everyone looks to take advantage of his neighbor, where the sons of men do not know the way of peace, are quick to shed innocent blood, and have poison on their lips.

Lions eating straw and wolves lying down with lambs?! The Gospel makes possible even greater things! The wild beasts are a picture of how human beings really are just as given to sin by nature as a wolf is to eating meat. But a lion deciding to go vegan is nothing compared to God taking a sinful human being, releasing him from the guilt of all his sin, and giving him a heart that no longer wants to sin but wants to do only the will of God!

As new creatures in Christ, united with the One who alone is holy by nature but who shares his holiness with us, this is exactly what has happened to us. God has created in us new hearts so that, while sin still clings, we truly want to please God and serve our neighbors. This is completely unnatural from the perspective of our old sinful selves! The disciples who out of fear abandoned Jesus in his hour of need did what came naturally.

But transformed by the power of the resurrection and by the risen Jesus' own word to them, "*Peace be with you,*" they went on to suffer persecution and imprisonment and even martyrdom for the sake of his name. You and I likewise have been transformed by the Holy Spirit's intervening in our lives and making us into the kind of people we would never possibly be without him.

To be sure, even the Church, the Bride of Christ, still has her spots and wrinkles. But she washes herself daily in the blood of the Lamb and is made a new creature. We who have been won by the Gospel, who believe in Christ and serve Christ, deny our worldly desires; we lay aside our wild nature and habits and daily strive to put down our inborn wrath and bitterness and jealousy. With the help of the Spirit, we are careful to maintain unity in the bond of peace. Instead of harm to one another, we do good. For here there is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman (Galatians 3:28). We are all one in Christ.

This peace will be perfected in the world to come. At that time, Christ's kingdom and reign will become true glory and honor. But the kingdom of peace has come already and is now, just as surely as the King of peace has come already and now lives and reigns to all eternity. God grant that we recognize anew and afresh the great blessings he has already bestowed on us in his kingdom! Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen