**Preparing for the Peaceable Kingdom**

**Advent II**

**December 8, 2019**

Isaiah 11: 1-10 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 3: 1-12

In 1914, in the midst of World War 1, on December 7 Pope Benedict the XV suggested a [temporary hiatus](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/christmas-truce-of-1914) of the war to celebrate Christmas. While the warring forces of Germany and the Allied forces refused to create an official truce, the soldiers on Christmas day declared their own unofficial truce. The History website describes it:

At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man’s-land, calling out “Merry Christmas” in their enemies’ native tongues. At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings and sang carols and songs. Some Germans lit Christmas trees around their trenches, and there was even a documented case of soldiers from opposing sides playing a good-natured game of soccer. German Lieutenant Kurt Zehmisch recalled: “How marvelously wonderful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way about it. Thus Christmas, the celebration of Love, managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a time.”

This is the kind of vision Isaiah talked about. A community where those who would usually be enemies or predator/prey would get along and even play together. Isaiah uses metaphorical language that is not meant to be taken literally but as an image for how we may work to create the shalom community, one where enemies sit down and work toward reconciliation and understanding. The vision is about a new leader that will judge with righteousness, and create a justice that is about fair distribution, balancing power imbalances (making sure the poor are treated fairly), or ensuring restoration for all. Righteousness in the biblical sense, according to Isaiah, is what we would call justice or social justice. It is caring for the poor, providing equity for the meek or vulnerable of the earth, and faithfulness as a grounding in all one does. It is a vision of a peaceable kingdom. Our world, as we have it, remains deeply out of sync with God’s righteousness and justice. Christians celebrate Advent, in part, to remind us of the glowing vision of God’s righteousness and justice, and to inspire us to join it here and now in anticipation of God’s final consummation of all things. It is a vision of community living harmony and justice.

In the gospel reading of Matthew, John the Baptist is proclaiming a message of repentance, of turning one’s life around in order to let go of everything that stands in the way of embodying shalom in our lives and communities. That we may live in love and gracious hospitality with one another in our neighbourhoods and where ever we go. This call to repentance, to bearing fruit that is worthy of repentance, connects with Isaiah’s vision and a leader of righteousness. It was transforming the community. It would have been a profound experience for the people to witness the religious leaders come to be baptized. It would have been even more significant and transforming to witness, as is named in the gospel of Luke, Roman soldiers coming to repent and be baptized, as ones who uphold the oppression of the community. It would have given real hope to those there, that something big is happening. When we were discussing this reading in our Congregational Care committee opening devotion, it was asked, what would they have had to indicate to John that they are ready to be baptised, that they are going to change? John asked them to bear fruit worthy of repentance so he would need to hear from them what they are going to do differently, how are they going to turn their lives around.

What fruit are you, are we, bearing that is worthy of repentance? What do people see in how we live our lives that shows people we are committed to following Jesus, and living a life of love and justice? How are we living toward the peaceable kingdom?

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we provide opportunities for those who are not part of the church to experience God’s love through Messy Church, Community Dinner, or Film and Faith

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we can share the joy of the season singing Christmas Carols in a coffee shop.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we provide opportunities for indigenous reconciliation and relationship building through serving breakfast together and INI Café.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we are open to hearing and learning from one another regarding differences and challenging issues.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when strikers and management can work together following a strike.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we can work to address climate change in a way that honours those whose livelihoods will be threatened and work together toward economic justice and climate justice.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we can name injustice for what it is, as we marked the 30th anniversary of the E’cole Polytechnique

massacre of 14 women as anti-feminist and misogynist.

We are living toward the peaceable kingdom when we can name publicly that we are praying for someone that we disagree with.

You may have seen the clip of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi addressing a reporter who asked her if she hated President Trump. Her response was very passionate and ended with her naming that she prays for him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zew7TAk2Eww>

Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Trump my feel he is being persecuted these days, but he has also been pretty harsh towards Speaker Pelosi, and yet she prays for him. She seeks to live out her faith and is being public about it.

On Friday night I was gifted with a ticket for the Jeffery Straker Prairie Christmas concert and he had some guest artists join him. One of them was JJ Voss and he sang a song by Garth Brooks, called Belleau Wood about the Christmas Truce. Near the end of the song, was a beautiful line that really struck me: “Heaven’s not beyond the clouds, it’s just beyond the fear”. If we can get beyond our fear, especially the fear that creates division and conflict, we would be on our way to creating the peaceable kingdom.

So may we embrace Isaiah’s vision for a peaceable kingdom, of harmony and justice and prepare for Jesus’ coming by changing our ways and working for just systems, that all may have enough and be treated equitably, moving beyond our fear to truly living out peace.