

“The Wolf Will Lie Down with the Lamb”

Isaiah 11:1-10

Richard C. Allen

December 4, 2016

South Glastonbury

Connecticut

Last Sunday, we looked closely at Isaiah’s vision of swords beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. This morning we have a similar, yet unique, vision from the same prophet. At a time in history when fear ruled the day, when fear had a tight grip on everyone’s heart, Isaiah raised up a new image, an image that reflects God’s desire for peace.

A wolf and a lamb lie down together and there is an absence of fear. How can this be? This can’t happen! In our imagination, it does not come to pass. But, in God’s imagination, it most certainly can happen; and, it **MUST** happen. In Isaiah’s vision, the wolf has no interest in ravaging the weaker critter, and the lamb is devoid of fear. There is no threat of danger, no intimidation. It is a picture of perfect peace. **Peace comes when those with power choose not to abuse their power.** Peace comes when those who have clout choose to use it in ways that do not engender fear. Fear is the nemesis of peace. Where fear is allowed to flourish, somebody is robbed of the gift of peace.

When I dwell on this image of the wolf and the lamb living together, I alternate between seeing myself in the lamb and seeing myself in the wolf. There is a part of me that feels vulnerable these days, and there is a part of me that wonders if I, in some way, am the oppressor. So, in a real sense, the work of peace making begins within myself. But it must not end there.

God's vision of the wolf and the lamb is a call to faith communities everywhere to labor to eliminate fear from family life, from local community life, and from life in the global community. This morning, we present a check for \$7000 to the Glastonbury Fuel and Food Bank. Its intent is to reduce the fear of being hungry or cold this winter. Many households in our town live with this fear, this wolf breathing down their necks. In a very direct way, that golf outing back in September was a giant step in reducing the dread.

As we read through the long list of mission partners we support through our generous mission giving, most of the allocations have to do with diminishing fear. The YMCA Literacy program helps eliminate the fear associated with not being able to read. The Gay Health Collective eliminates the fear of not having adequate health care. True Colors addresses the fear of being treated with discrimination.

No one here can begin to imagine the fear that a refugee family fleeing Syrian chaos feels in their bones. But we can welcome them, register them for school, take them to medical appointments, play with them in the parks, steer them toward employment opportunities, show up for family birthdays. Isaiah the prophet raises up the vision of the wolf and the lamb for the Albukaai Family, and for families everywhere who go to bed at night not knowing what the next day will bring.

Wolves and lambs don't naturally lie down together. They don't naturally say to each other, "Stop by for tea," or "Let's play a game of Scrabble," or "Let's ride bikes together." Thus, this image of peace is counter-intuitive; counter-cultural. It doesn't just happen naturally. It takes work. It takes people with power choosing to use their power to build up and not to tear down. It takes people of faith to live into the Law of Love. It takes a miracle, really!

When I picture the wolf and the lamb snuggling together on a cold December night, I think, “It would take a miracle.” And that thought doesn’t deter us for one second! For we are the people who actually believe in miracles!

Many of you know I attended a boarding school for my high school years. In those days it was known as Williston Academy. We had fierce rivalries in sports with the surrounding prep schools: Loomis, Deerfield, Mount Hermon, Wilbraham, Kingswood. Gladly, all those schools are now co-educational, having merged with the nearby schools for girls. But the rivalries were fierce. Major turf wars on the soccer fields and the basketball courts and the baseball diamonds. We would compete tooth and nail until the bitter end. The wolf in each of us was alive! Then, after each game ended, we had what was known as a tea, together with the other team, with our rivals. The tea usually turned out to be hot chocolate. And there were cookies and brownies. But it was known as the tea. At the tea, we were civil with each other. We complimented the other’s coaches, the other’s strong suits. We even made friends. To this day, I have coffee once a month with two guys, Cubby and Shorty, from Kingswood who duked it out with me on the basketball court in 1964.

I’d like to invite the world to tea! It could be right here in our new social hall. All the nations, all the races, all the ethnic groups, all the sexual orientations, all the Native peoples, all the religions: we’d all leave our guns and hatchets and missiles and six shooters at the door, and we’d have tea. We’d get to know each other as the unique human beings we are. We’d make some new friends. We’d build the peace. We’d be a modern interpretation of the wolf and the lamb lying down together. And we’d all get a good night sleep that night because the fear would have dissolved; the fear would have disappeared; the fear would not be invited to the tea.

Take the wolf and the lamb home with you today. Tape them to your refrigerator door. Let their fearless cuddling inform your understanding of the kind of Peace God has in mind for this Advent Season and beyond. I'll do the same. And we'll all remain in the greatest of hope! Amen.