

When we ask for PEACE ON EARTH, what do we mean? God's Peace, Shalom, is not only a Cosmic Peace, a peace between Nations and Races and Cultures, but restorative justice between every person and family member. As we begin this morning I need for us to consider all of the broken relationships of our lives... Words spoken with venom. Actions taken to Cut-Off all relationship forever, being DEAD to one another. Generations after, what is required to begin anew?

Every summer, growing up our parents sent us to our Grandparent's Farm outside Syracuse, New York. Among my earliest memories are the 2 Storey white Farmhouse, with another family living upstairs. The huge wraparound porch and wood cellar door we pretended to use as a slide. In the front yard was an enormous Maple tree with tire swing and a circle drive that wrapped around. There was an enormous old wood 3 Storey barn built into the hillside, so the main barn could be accessed by a wagon from one side, the hayloft above, and the cows and horse were stabled, fed and the cows milked in the cool dank lower level that always had this acrid sweet stench. After milking, my grandfather would take us outside each morning to watch the sun come up, describing that his grandfather had cleared all these acres with a team of oxen.

40 some years later, I returned to officiate at my Grandmother's funeral, but drove passed the farm no longer recognizing it. The County highway had been widened taking out the Maple tree. The 3 Storey Barn had been dismantled, foundation stones the only marker anything had ever been there. The porch on the house had been removed, the house now Aluminum sided pink. At the same time, where there had been fields lush in crops as far as the eye could see, dense new forests had grown anew.

One of the models, Preachers are given is that Martin Luther carried a Bible in one hand and Newspaper in the other. That Sermons should be informed by the circumstances of the present day. The New Testament is filled with phrases like "Immediately" and "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand". But Isaiah is different. The Old Testament shifts from the ancient Patriarchs in Genesis, to the heritage of Tribes searching for the Promised Land, to the Chronicles of building the Monarchy, to the history of Israel being destroyed, THEN for over 700 years (as long as from Columbus discovering America until today, plus the years from the American Revolution until now) the Old Testament people longed for a Savior. We have a tendency to believe in incremental change, evolution of ideas, HOWEVER the Old Testament casts visions of a future day, when God's Justice will be done, when cut-off relationships will begin again, hundreds or thousands of years in the future.

Throughout the 40 years represented in the first part of Isaiah, the Assyrians attacked and destroyed every culture and village and Nation in their path, 8 different times. Then 200 years after the Assyrians destroyed the Northern 10 Tribes of Israel, the Babylonian hordes destroyed and exiled the Southern Nation of Judah. Realize the City of Jerusalem had been surrounded by concentric stone walls, like a Bull's Eye, these stone fortifications were 60 - 80 feet high and 4 to 6 feet thick. Jerusalem's defenses lay in ruin, only the foundation stones level with the earth still in place. More than buildings and defenses, first they carried off the leadership, then the most highly skilled and educated, then the laborers, business leaders and shop keepers, until Israel and Judah were a decaying stump. That Exile lasted for 70 years, until Persia invaded Babylon and Judah returned to what had been a warzone left abandoned, fallow for 70 years.

Our youngest son is getting married the week after Christmas. Among the things my mother had taught me was how to knit and do embroidery, and I also have a love of Genealogy, so as a gift I have been freehand cross-stitching the Bride's and the Groom's family genealogies from the last 500 years. But as we talked last summer, each of our sons expressed doubts, with Global Warming, with Racism and Hate, about ever bringing a child into the world. Which was hard to hear, because their births and raising each,

were among the greatest joys of my life.

So will the family tree be cut off, or will further generations be planted?

Two weeks ago, my wife and I were horseback riding through the forests at Pinetop and Show-Low. As we came through a section of forest that had been destroyed by the fires of the last few years, AND YET we saw the most amazing thing. Here was a boulder of solid rock, surrounded by a burned over area. But that impervious stone, untouched by years of erosion, undisturbed by fire, was now being split open by the growth a tiny Ponderosa Pine sprout, the tendrils of its roots ever searching for crevices for life to grow.

Edward Hicks was an 18th Century American Quaker who painted the classic picture of this passage described as "The Peaceable Kingdom." Actually over his career, Hicks repainted that image 62 times, with the Quakers trading with the Native Peoples on one side and the Lion and Leopard and the Lamb, the Wolf and the Goat, the Calf and Fat Heifer, with a Child and Serpent on the other. But as he became more and more disillusioned with the way people treated the native peoples and the evolution of these Colonies into a new Nation, Edward Hick's Carnivores of Nature developed more teeth and larger claws, his perception of the World becoming more fierce. As if to scream the message of Isaiah's Prophecy, that THE POWER OF GOD IS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF HUMANITY!

Our vision from Isaiah is actually of a hinged pair of paintings. In the one panel is the Coming Savior, everything about him sings of strength, bravery and valor, there is deep wisdom and compassion in his eyes, joy and confidence in his posture. The Messiah is surrounded by the poor who look at him with admiration and radiate hope. On the hills behind them are graves of all the dead kings of past generations, from David to the Deportation and the Deportation to the Present.

Ironic that the picture is from David on, not from Saul and Jonathan, or from Solomon on, or the current leaders backward. Because King David had been different from all the rest. David was not the eldest child of a King, born in palace royalty. David was the 8th Son of Jesse, born in the Village of Bethlehem, a shepherd boy, the youngest and smallest, so often forgotten out in the field.

There is a contrast here between people in the time of Isaiah: No longer willing to plant crops because the invading armies will destroy the fields before they bare produce; Unwilling to have a child because of the suffering they might grow up into;

VERSUS this new David, this new sprout of Jesse, for David had been loved simply because he was the one God loved. Without David's own sins and failings, this Son of Jesse, this Savior is a New Adam!

In the second painting is a new Garden of Eden. There are beautiful Wolves, sleek Leopards, Lions, Bears, healthy well-fed Calves, Heifers, Sheep and Goats. AND why a child playing with a beautiful snake? Because in the fall of Eden, the curse had been not only that Adam would have to sweat to raise produce, not only that Eve would bear pain in child-baring, but that there would be hate between humanity and Serpent; that the snake should bite at our heels and we would throw rocks at the snake's head.

I have routinely heard people skeptical that in the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark and in this Vision that Lions and Wolves would ever eat straw?! What is far more surprising to me, is in this vision of the Peaceable Kingdom, a Second Eden, of God's Shalom, that the Lamb and Goat and Calf and Infant do not appear apprehensive or doubtful but forgiving and trusting.