

**The Peaceable Kingdom of Christ**  
Home Moravian, Second Advent 2025  
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**Isaiah 11:1-10**

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

**INTRODUCTION**

As Ginny said last week, Advent is the season for Patient Waiting in the church calendar. Advent at Home Church is also the time for Candle Tea, Christmas parties, making garlands, and preparing special music. I am often awe-struck by how many thousands hours of volunteering we have at Home Church leading up to the crescendo of our Christmas Eve candlelight services. We do all this work as a gift to the wider community as we open the doors of the sanctuary and the Brothers House to receive thousands of guests, and introduce them to Moravian hospitality while sharing our faith in Jesus Christ.

We also do this because we love the spirit of comradery and fellowship we feel as we rehearse anthems, ring bells, gather greens, don our 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian apparel,

trim candles, and sing Hosanna with the children leading. And one of the most wonderful things this Advent is to welcome new people into our congregation through baptism because today is the Sunday we remember John the Baptizer who calls us to prepare for the reign of Christ.

## EDWARD HICKS

For many years now I've worn my camelhair coat and a leather belt on the second Sunday in Advent in honor of John the Baptist who wore a hairshirt and girded his loins with leather. I draw the line at eating wild locusts, though. Honey is fine, locusts no. This year, though, I'm wearing a special tie that was a gift from a friend. The picture on my tie is the famous painting by Edward Hicks called the Peaceable Kingdom. There is a copy of the whole painting on a wall in the Bishops House. It is a visualization of the prophecy from Isaiah that I just read.

Hicks was what art historians call a folk artist, meaning that he did not have formal training. He started his career as a sign painter, and his artwork was simple and rather straightforward. Hicks lost his mother while he was an infant, and he was raised by his mother's best friend because his father was too poor to care for him. As a young man, Hicks joined the Society of Friends and a few years later his congregation approved him to be a Quaker minister.

Hicks supplemented his meager income by painting. Some of his paintings were portraits or decorative pieces, but the theme that he returned to time and again was the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 11, verses 6-8. He painted at least 62 versions of this prophecy, which he titled the Peaceable Kingdom.

Hicks' paintings were not just illustrations of a Bible passage, they were summaries of Quaker teaching. Hicks included in the biblical tableau William Penn making a treaty with Native Americans to allow Europeans to settle peacefully on their lands. This was in sharp contrast with the United State government's policy of forced removal of the Cherokee and other Native Americans from their lands. You may wonder why Hicks would include a political message in his depiction of an ancient biblical text, but he was being true to the message communicated by the prophet Isaiah.

## STUMP OF JESS

Isaiah is the most popular Old Testament prophet for Christians. The only book quoted more in the New Testament than Isaiah is the Psalms. Handel set three

sections of Isaiah to music in his great oratorio *The Messiah*, but interestingly he didn't include chapter 11, which is a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. When Christian theologians, scholars, and composers quote Isaiah, they tend to focus on the later sections, which point clearly to Jesus as the expected Messiah rather than earlier chapters that focus more on the current kingdom of Judah.

I suspect that the prophecies in Isaiah chapter 11 have been too radical or idealistic for most theologians and composers. It was only someone who was both an artist and religious dissenter, like Hicks, who could see the poetry and possibility of this passage and make it the centerpiece of Christian hope.

There are three distinct parts to this prophecy. First, there is a messianic prediction that says a shoot will emerge from the stump of Jesse. That is a poetic way of saying that a descendant of Jesse will appear and do great things. But I bet many of you are wondering who Jesse was and why would people care about his descendants.

According to the Book of Samuel, the youngest son of Jesse was anointed by the priest Samuel to be the king of Israel. That youngest son was named David, and his descendants sat on the throne in Jerusalem for centuries. So Isaiah was predicting that a new king would emerge who would be as great as David or perhaps even greater. As we say in one of our hymns, the messiah would be "great David's greater son."

## THE MESSIAH

Isaiah says that the messiah would be different from previous rulers who often exploited the people and lived in luxury. The new king, the messiah, would be different. Isaiah says he will be filled with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, with knowledge of the Lord and fear of the Lord.

History is littered with kings, generals, and presidents who were powerful and wealthy, but foolish. One of the worst things that can happen to a nation is to have a leader who lacks wisdom, understanding, and fear of the Lord. Such rulers place themselves on pedestals and reward those who lavish them with praise and gifts while ignoring the suffering of the people. They do not seek justice. They love only themselves.

God's chosen ruler, though, will be different from most kings. The true messiah, Isaiah says will be wise, understanding, and humble before God. This leads to the second section of the prophecy. The true messiah will promote justice. He will not be biased toward the rich and powerful who offer bribes and support; he will show

justice to the poor and needy. The promised descendant of David will obey God's commandments to care for the orphans, widows, and homeless in the land. He will not condone or pardon the wealthy and powerful who enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and powerless.

Notice that Isaiah equates righteousness, justice, and faithfulness. Too often churches today are divided between those who preach social justice and those who promote personal righteousness. One side condemns the ills of society and calls for social reforms while the other side condemns the sins of individuals and calls for people to repent. But the biblical prophets, such as Isaiah, recognized that faithfulness includes every aspect of life. The messiah will pursue justice for all.

### PEACEABLE KINGDOM

So far, Isaiah sounds like most Old Testament prophets and even like John the Baptist in the passage that Ginny read earlier in the service. Most of the prophets in the Bible called upon kings and rulers to be wise and just. Most of the prophets in the Bible condemned people who lived in self-indulgent luxury while their neighbors suffer from hunger, illness, and poverty. Prophets all called for justice for the poor.

But Isaiah's vision of the messiah goes even further. He offers a vision of a messianic age in which humans and nature live in perfect harmony. Cynics dismiss Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom as a naïve dreamland, a utopia. A cynic once said that the leopard will lie down with the goat, but only the leopard will get up again.

Indeed, it would be foolish to take this vision literally today and let infants play over the nest of poisonous snakes. I remember taking a walk with one of my daughters when she was young, and we saw a baby copperhead snake. She was angry at me because I would not let her play with it, but we are not yet in the age predicted by Isaiah. In nature, there are still predators and prey and we should not let biblical literalism lead us into lethal mistakes.

It is possible, and perhaps likely, that Isaiah was not really talking about animals here. It is possible that he was using animals to talk about humans. What if the predators and prey in this vision are humans? Don't we describe some people as predators because they repeatedly attack, harm, and abuse those whom they see as weak? Don't we talk the wolves of Wall St and lions of industry. Too often we glorify human predators successfully exploiting the weakness of others.

What if Isaiah's vision is not about a holy menagerie on Mt. Zion but is really a vision of a just society where human predators, the wolves, leopards, lions, and cobras learn to become civilized people? What if Isaiah was granted a vision of a society where no one is victimized? What if the prophet dreamed of a world where children are so safe they can roam freely and where adults follow the leading of children?

I think this is what Edward Hicks was trying to say in his artistic reflections on this prophecy in Isaiah. He knew what he was doing when he included William Penn peacefully negotiating with the native inhabitants of Pennsylvania alongside the picture of a child leading a lion. I think Hicks understood that Isaiah was teaching us that the first step to living in the peaceable kingdom is for the followers of Christ, the Messiah, to treat all people with respect, to protect the rights and dignity of all people, to put away the weapons of hatred and fear.

## COMING OF CHRIST

This is not the vision of the future that is preached in many churches today or on the internet. For many years, Christians in America have been told to fear the Second Coming of Christ who will come in vengeance and wrath. The four horsemen of the apocalypse have so dominated Christian imagination in modern times that many Christians believe that war, famine, pestilence, and genocide are part of God's plan for the world.

But it doesn't have to be that way. What if Christians today gave greater attention to Isaiah's vision of the coming of a Messiah who brings justice and peace? What if we focus on the reign of Christ as a time of freedom from fear? What if our patient waiting for Christ included being peacemakers and healers rather than cynics?

## CONCLUSION

It is not just Quakers who dreamed of a peaceful kingdom. Our Moravian theologian John Amos Comenius encouraged Christians to focus less on our sinfulness and more on Christ redemption. He believed that Christians can and should prepare for Christ's reign on earth by abolishing violence and intimidation in our churches, our schools, our politics, and especially in our homes.

I'll conclude with a favorite quotation from Moravian bishop John Amos Comenius who dedicated his life to teaching as Christ taught and who labored for the peaceable kingdom to be born on earth.

“Someone may say here and now that I am indulging in a drunken dream. But I only wish that those who chase after worldly prosperity would sleep off their intoxication and begin to drink abundantly of this infinitely better sweetness. Let all dream about nothing but Christ, heaven, universal salvation, mutual charity and edification, and the Sabbath rest from sorry enslavement to sin! Indeed, let us do as men usually do when wine has made them merry, and open our mouths in cries of jubilation. Let us sing aloud the hymn of victory to Christ as conqueror and the wedding hymn of the lamb as the bridegroom of the church!” Amen.