

“Make Room for Reconciliation”: Peace, Advent 4
Text: Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 1:18-25
12.23.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Here is the Advent response card that will be distributed during our morning worship gathering this week.

Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 1:18-25

In that day the heir to David's throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place.

Isaiah 11:10

GO DEEPER

Peace is not just an announcement of divine-initiative. It's an invitation to participate in a new way of life that makes for peace right here, right now. Although peace is divinely initiated, it must be humanly implemented. It's up to us to make peace; to be transformed into the kind of people who not only expect for things to get better, but who help to make things better! Peace-makers.

RESPONSE:

Isaiah 11:1-10 gives us a picture of how the very presence & awe of God, takes relationships which are naturally opposed and then "recovers" (v11) them. He "re-purposes" our conflicts as we participate with Him and live into a greater awareness of his reality (e.g. fear of the Lord). As Isaiah 11 emphasizes... Invite the "spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, of knowledge and the "fear of the Lord" into your present conflict. Assume they are not beneath God, but rather redeemable within the domain of God's presence as you say yes to Him.

TAKE A STEP: This week, write out where your fears lie. Meditate on Isaiah 11:1-11. Then, bearing in mind that "fear of the Lord" implies being overwhelmed with wonder, with relationship, before the Lord - ask yourself how you might "delight in the fear of the Lord" (v 3) rather than in the fears and conflicts of life. Ask Him to reveal how you might reposition yourself to become willing to head into your fears and to bring peace out of them. Ask God to speak his strength and courage into your heart.

"Given the profound nature of reconciliation imaged for us in the Advent of Christ, at what point are we willing to consider any circumstance unrecoverable? Any relationship 'irreconcilable'?"

Teaching Notes...

As much as I value predictability and routine, in my life, I love films that I can't figure out within minutes of the opening credits. I love unsuspecting characters and surprising twists in the plot. Something that leaves you saying, "*I didn't see that one coming!*"

The OT (Law, the prophets and the writings) was a story in search of an ending. A dilemma in quest for resolution. You get to the end of this story and the screen goes black. The Dolby goes silent. "**To be continued...**" "*What just happened here? You can't leave us like this!?*"

Exactly. That's the feel of Advent.

It doesn't take long to discover the kind of world in which the Advent stories are unfolding. It is a world that is teeming with "the Other"; with transcendence--- where there's more going on than what's going on. It is world which God not only speaks into existence, but into which God is speaking. He acts. He interacts.

It reminds us that we not 'by' ourselves. We have not been left 'to' ourselves. We have not been left in this vast universe with no resources other than our own experiences and interpretations of what's real--- what's right and what's good.

In this kind of world, we often use the unfortunate Advent-terminology of God '*breaking into*' our world. It makes a couple of ill-advised assumptions: first, that **here** is 'no place' (no room) for God. He is an intruder... the unwelcomed guest. Second, in his refusal to be ignored, he must trump us with his sovereignty.

While we say that "*love leaves me no other choice*", our choice is made in the context of a host of options. In order to know love, I must be free to choose--- even if that choice isn't for God.

In ancient cultures, dreams were considered a means by which God would attempt to communicate with us. They were somehow God's attempt at broadening our vision of what might be possible if we were to be able to somehow see beyond the limits of what we were seeing. Dreams are an important part of the Advent story.

It's hard to dream with your eyes wide open!

What you see (in your present circumstance and surroundings) often resists such an image. So, God must find a way to communicate with us that doesn't ignore our conscious, but simply challenges us beyond its limits.

These aren't Joseph's dreams. They were God's dreams conveyed to Joseph. It's about what God is up to in his world and Joseph's willingness to participate.

The best dreams are not necessarily the ones that come true, but the ones that encourage us to live truthfully.

You'll notice that the dreams were never meant to provide some *"alternative reality"* to which Joseph might escape. Joseph's dreams did not involve cascading falls of milk chocolate. He didn't see himself *"passing through the seven levels of the Candy Cane forest, and through the sea of swirly-twirly gum drops..."*

M.L. King's, *"I have a dream"*, speech was not a fanciful vision of some magic kingdom, but was a vision of (for) this world... only better!

"When Joseph woke up, he _____" [fill in the blank].

This is the pivotal moment. *"What will Joseph do with all that he has heard?"*

Faith requires that we respond in tangible ways that signals our willingness to cooperate; that says that we "believe" (finish the wedding plans, secure the reception venue, decorate the baby's room, etc.)

It's why Joseph is identified as a 'righteous' man. Righteousness describes his character. It defines his relationships. He does the right thing.

"This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Some Greek scholars translate it, *"The book of the new Genesis wrought by Jesus Christ."*

If you're a first century Jew, totally steeped in this narrative, and you hear Matthew talking about Jesus and a new Genesis? Matthew is saying, what you are about to hear is about the re-creation of the whole world. God's dream for the world, come true. **"Shalom"**.

"Shalom" is a Hebrew word which means, complete, whole, nothing broken, no missing parts, everything relating well. It describes something complex which has lots of moving parts, each functioning according to design.

It's not a vision of different world, but the present world fully restored to its original beauty and functionality.

The Advent story both celebrates and implicates us.

Matthew provides (3) titles for Jesus which distinguishes him and fixes him firmly within the Jewish narrative:

The Messiah: *Christos* (the Christ; Anointed One)

Peace (shalom) characterizes the first few chapters of the Story. Eden is an image of everything as it ought to be--- the weaving together of God, humanity, and all created order in love. You need not attempt to define it because it's all that you know, until...

Shalom fractured. "Sin".

Sin was not simply offered as “one really bad choice”, but a condition which left humanity feeling disoriented and homeless. Adam and Eve could no longer find it within themselves to trust God and once trust is gone, the relationship is crippled. Everything for which we were to care suffers our determination to put ourselves first.

“*Messiah*”--- this shadowy figure on the horizon--- who is portrayed as one who would come and establish God’s longingly-restorative rule over the world.

The Son of Abraham: “... *the father of all who believe*” (Romans 4:16). He would be the ‘true Israelite’. He would be all that God’s people were meant to be and, in turn, all that we as humans were meant to be. This was the author’s way of saying that the entire Jewish narrative is reaching its climax in Jesus.

The Son of David: the story included the promise that this one who would come would rule would have “royal lineage”. “23andme” would trace him back to David (2 Samuel 7). He would not be like many of the failed Kings of Israel whose quest for power and prominence would cause them to forfeit their role as “shepherd” of God’s people.

“You shall call his name, Jesus (God saves), because he will save his people from their sins.” A one-sentence summary of the entire story offered by Matthew. The name had to do with the child’s identity.

For Matthew, who uses the term ‘fulfillment’ more than any other biographer, says that this is “gospel”. This is nothing short of a new Genesis. A new beginning. I think what makes God even more amazing than his ability to “**create**” is his capacity to “**re-create**”: to take what’s been abused and blemished and actually restore its glory [significance; recognize it for what it really is].

“For God was in Christ, reconciling (‘to receive with favor’) the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5)

In Ephesians 2:13, this same author describes it as “being far away and now being brought near”.

Why the void of “shalom” in our lives?

First, we confuse peace with serenity. We survived the last round of cuts at work. Gas is under \$3.00 a gallon. Consumer confidence levels are high. Our kids secured their place on the honor role. The Seahawks are making a push for the playoffs. Tranquility!

Second, we exchange shalom for relief. We confuse numbness with peace. The most deceptive sensation you can experience is the feeling of peace in the midst of your chaotic choices [Jeremiah 6:14].

Third, we function under the guise of our own sufficiency. We tend to “over-correct”. We can get this thing back between the lines if we are able to counter-act each

of the elements. Steer into the skid. It's a bit instinctual, but every movement only contributes to the chaos.

I think, "Peace on earth", is the message that's most appealing because we hear it in the context of all that is chaotic and broken and dysfunctional in our lives.

Peace is not just an announcement or declaration. It's an invitation to participate in a new way of life that makes for peace right here, right now.

Jesus, in Matthew 5 says that this peace that is divinely initiated, must be humanly implemented. It's up to us to be "peacemakers. We are to be transformed into the kind of people who not only expect things to get better, but who help to make things better!

God desires more for us; he expects more of us.

The truth of that statement gets lost in all the harsh and rigid demands that we set alongside of it.

To say that God desires more for us speaks to the robust nature of the life for which we were created (John 10:10).

To say that God desires more of us is to experience the full measure of the life and love made available to us in relationship with him and to accept the responsibility that is associated with being identified with him.