

Created for Peace

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1 – 10

The prophet Isaiah was well acquainted with the sorrows of war. During his ministry, the nation of Judah was precariously positioned in the middle of conflicts between Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. They were between a rock and a hard place! The hopes and dreams of the Hebrew people had been cut down to nothing.

But then, out of the stump came a fresh green sprig. But then, out of the barren symbols of ruin comes the residue of their hopes and dreams. But then, out the dark future came a ray of hope. But then, out of progress undone came a great word of hope – PEACE!

Isaiah's vision does not spring forth from his experience of the world because Isaiah is a prophet during one of the darkest times in Hebrew history. There was nothing around Isaiah suggesting peace was about to take root. There was absolutely nothing around Isaiah that was pushing its way up through the fallow ground of his circumstances.

I suspect that this feeling of peace came from the pit of Isaiah's stomach when he saw the conflict and violence all about him. It is this same 'dis-ease' that we feel when we fight with our spouse, blow up at our kids, fight with our family members, fight with our church family members, or speak a harsh word against our neighbor.

We sense within ourselves that it should not be this way because we have been created in the image of God and thus, we were created for peace. Hear these words again - We sense within ourselves that it should not be this way because we have been created in the image of God and thus, we were created for peace.

Let me personalize these words - You sense within yourself that it should not be this way because you have been created in the image of God and thus you were created for peace.

Let us peer over Isaiah's shoulder and look at the landscape of your life. Let us look at the fruitful and barren places in your life. Fix your gaze on the hollowest, weathered, and scarred up stumps you can find in your life. You will know when you have found these places – they are the ones that churn in your stomach every time you see it. Would you believe that even there, peace can appear? I know many of you would answer – no peace can not appear in that part of my life!

In relationships that you think will never change, peace can appear! In circumstances that seem hopeless, peace can appear! In the most unlikely places, peace can appear! In a nation with great division within it, peace can occur! In communities with racial tensions, peace can occur! In the most inhospitable places in your life, peace can appear!

It is true, peace can appear. You can count on it because you have been created for peace.

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Let me share with Isaiah 11:6 again – ‘The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion will lie down together, and a little child shall lead them.’

The Prophet Isaiah imagines an awesome scenario. His context and audience suggest a world view where peace seems impossible.

The 8th great-grandson of David, Ahaz, is King of Judah, but gone is the courage to fight against religious and political occupation of Judah. Like a stump of a tree, the people seem cut off from the presence of God. Oh, there have been moments of peace when the Hebrews made alliances with the Assyria, Egypt, or Babylon. But those moments of peace we were fleeting.

Into a reality marked by corruption, war, oppression, and fear; the Prophet Isaiah imaginatively speaks of a time and place where natural foes abide with one another. Isaiah imagines a time and place where children play together. Can you picture the time and place that Isaiah lived during?

Into a world marked by corruption, tension, oppression, and fear; can you imagine a time and place like this? Do we live in such a time? With Coronavirus and systemic racism and social unrest, do we live in such a time? With an election fast approaching when our nation could split and change forever, is Isaiah's vision incompatible with our world or is Isaiah's vision what we need now?

Can you see a time and place when democrat and republican can work in harmony? Can you see a time and place when brothers and sisters within this church can get along? Can you see the peace that Isaiah speaks about? Is Isaiah's vision impossible for us?

We are not far removed from the conditions of Isaiah's audience. Although threats of religious and political occupation seem as farfetched as the USA appointing a king, expanding income inequality testifies to corruption breeding oppression. Our vast government defense spending propagates the ever-present fear of war.

Isaiah's witness inspires the hope of peace and it calls us to activate our faith story to create an awesome scenario of peace. Into our reality, peace seems impossible, but through Isaiah's words – peace is possible!

Let us always be a church that prayerfully anticipates and actively participates in the coming of God's 'shalom' or peace. Let us always be a place that imagines a reality where Eden can be restored, where reconciliation can be established, and where children lead predators and prey in parades of peace – ultimate peace!

Let us hear and see Isaiah's vision of peace! Let us not waste our glorious past and present promise. Let us be a place of peace!

Let us pray:

God, grant us faith enough to expect your peace to appear, even or perhaps especially, in the most unlikely and inhospitable places.

Prince of Peace, come into our world of war, come into our systems of hate, come into our realities of fear, and give us peace. Come into our political system, come into our culture, come into our church, and give us peace. AMEN.