The Rev. Jennifer King Daugherty
Second Sunday of Advent – December 7, 2025

A Peaceable Life

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Peaceable Kingdom, Edward Hicks (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

[Isaiah 11:1-12] *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the*

knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Our first reading from Isaiah is a cornerstone of Advent: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might." It is a timeless expression of both longing and promise for God to break into the injustice and suffering of this world and do something new.

Isaiah wrote these words some 2700 years ago in Jerusalem, a time of massive political upheaval. Assyria was the dominant empire of its day, sweeping through the region, destroying nations, and pressing hard toward Judah. The siege of Jerusalem exposed a long line of rulers who lacked the courage and character to protect their people -- especially the most vulnerable.

The prophet Isaiah is a witness to all of this. Amid the wreckage, he proclaims the oracle we heard today -- the promise that God will send a new, righteous ruler – a Spirit-filled leader who will inaugurate justice, return the exiled, and make creation whole. Isaiah was speaking about a leader in his own time, yet the vision is so compelling that Christians have long seen it as pointing toward the reconciling life of Christ.

And what does Isaiah promise will happen with the new ruler? "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." It is a world of safety and interdependence—without predation, domination, or the vulnerability of the young. It is a peaceable kingdom.

If you look at the cover of your bulletin, you'll see a painting of *The Peaceable Kingdom* by the 19th century Quaker preacher and painter Edward Hicks. For Hicks, Isaiah's imagery captured his deepest spiritual longing – peace that is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice and reconciliation.

Quakers believed that nonviolence and mercy were not external realities, but ones that come from the "inner light" of God guiding one's heart toward peace, compassion, and truth. Hicks trusted this so completely that he created more than sixty versions of *The Peaceable Kingdom* over the course of his life.

The animals in his paintings can be understood symbolically. The lion represents our impulses and passions -- the things in us that want to roar or dominate. The lamb represents our wiser instincts -- patient presence, the willingness to be still and listen. Peace comes when these can coexist within us, when the lion and the lamb in our own hearts learn to lie down together. This is not a new idea. Francis of Assisi once said, "Before you speak of peace, you must first have it in your heart."

There is no peacemaking in the world that does not begin with peacemaking in the soul. I learned this truth powerfully when I visited the Holy Land five years ago. Our group met a Jewish father and Muslim mother who spoke of the friendship that developed after each had lost a child in the ongoing conflict. Their courage in hearing and honoring each other's stories created a bond of compassion that gave their lives purpose and hope. I was reminded that peace does not begin with agreement; it begins with the willingness to truly see another person.

The theme of the second Sunday of Advent is peace and we know how desperately our world needs it. We feel the strain in our public life, the brittleness in our relationships, the fear that grips so many communities. But Advent does not ask us to pretend everything is fine. Advent asks us to stand in the tension with honesty and hope, to trust that God is even now working to break into the injustice and sorrow of our time and do something new.

We stand in this tension not as passive spectators, but as active bearers of God's peace. So how do we do that?

First, we remember that peace is not niceness or the ability to keep everything calm on the surface. Peace is not something we enforce on others but something we embody and offer – a way of being that God can work with. It is courageous and it is costly. It is a choice we make every day.

There are practices that help cultivate this inner landscape of peace. One is simple but profoundly difficult: *We seek to understand rather than to be understood.* We come to conversations with humility and respect, remembering that each person is carrying something we cannot see. We listen and learn rather than categorize and evaluate.

This is not easy -- our inner attitudes are often rash and judgmental. The ego seems to seek things to oppose or fix. When our minds can judge someone or something as inferior, we feel superior. And if we are honest, we recognize how

often our thoughts move toward resistance and rejection.[1] Advent invites us to notice this pattern and to ask God to soften the places where we have grown rigid or reactive.

Another practice: *We honor relationships over the need to be right.* We respect each person's unique journey. We choose empathy over argument, remembering that our calling is not to win but to love. Peace scholars like John Paul Lederach remind us how deep this work goes. He writes that peacemaking begins with the capacity to imagine yourself in relationship with your enemy—because if you cannot imagine that relationship, peace collapses before it begins.

It also requires resisting the trap of dualistic thinking that divides the world into "with us or against us." Dualism blinds us to the truth that we belong to each other, whether we agree or not. Peace asks us to imagine a web of relationships that includes people we struggle with – not only them, but their children and grandchildren. That is the holy imagination that peace demands.

Finally, to live as peacemakers, *we learn to trust that we are part of a story bigger than our own*.[2] Peace is never the work of only one person; it is a long movement across cultures, communities, and generations. We are not inventing something new but joining God's ongoing work of reconciliation and the flourishing of all creation.

Recognizing this "bigger story" takes humility and curiosity. Our own experiences and cultural lens are only part of the picture. History, wounds, and unseen dynamics shape every conflict, and we can only understand them if we go looking. We place ourselves in this larger story to stand with those -- across borders and identities -- who were building peace long before we arrived.

So, this Advent, let us commit ourselves to the practices of peace: Seek to understand, honor relationships, and trust God's bigger story. May the lion and the lamb in each of us learn to lie down together. May the inner light of God be our guide. And by God's grace, may we become people who bear peace wherever we go.

Amen.

[1] Richard Rohr calls this, "the universal addiction." From "Resistance and Negation," November 11, 2019.

[2] One of the principles of Amplify Peace.