

Series: Lessons from the Lectionary

Today: Prince of Peace

Text: Isaiah 11:1-10

**A Communion Meditation preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.
Sunday, December 5, 1010
First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

At our 10:30 service a few weeks ago, we baptized Troy McKinney and welcomed him into this community of faith. He was a charming child for me to baptize. He leaned over and looked into the bowl where the water was. When I placed the water on his head, he broke out into a huge smile. As I carried him down the aisle, he reached out to people who were sitting there. He was quite an amazing child.

At the end of the service I heard this comment from more than one of you: *"He stole the show!"* And my response was this: *"He didn't steal the show. He was the show."* On November 14th little Troy McKinney reminded all of us that if we really want to understand how God works, how God views the world, all we need is to see it through the eyes of a child.

If we are able to capture this feeling, we stand in the prophetic tradition of Isaiah when he spoke these words: *"A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit...The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the goat; the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child shall lead them."*

Isaiah speaks to the tribes of Judah who have been taken into captivity by the Assyrians about 720 years before the birth of Christ. They long to return to their homes and to a better day when David was King and Israel was strong. They are languishing in a foreign land, and they want a military leader who will guide them to greatness again, and Isaiah talks to them about a child.

Isaiah says that if they are looking for a king to lead them from captivity to freedom they need to be looking in the right places. They will not find him in the conventional view of a military ruler who

will establish a temporal kingdom. They will know the Messiah has come when: 1) Priorities Change; and 2) They Follow a Child.

Priorities Change

The unexpected events which Isaiah prophesies are a change in the priorities of the culture to which he was speaking. He speaks of a social order which is turned upside down; where the rich are poor and the poor become rich. He speaks of a cosmic order turned upside down; where natural enemies feel at home with one another; wolves and lambs lying down together; lions and cows feeding together.

There is something in us that wants to argue with this vision. As one colleague put it, *“Everyone knows that in the real world, a lamb in a lion’s lair is lunch. Reason and reality assure us that a little child cannot lead a wolf or a lion on a leash without being a dead child. And we want to be so reasonable.”* [Source: Pulpit Resource, Vol. 23.#4, p. 43].

Imagine a world where success was not defined by the position you hold or the amount of money you have been able to acquire. Imagine a world where you were judged not by what you own, but by the good deeds you have accomplished in your lifetime. Imagine a world where no one went hungry because of a political dispute; or where no one died because they could not afford health care. Isaiah says that the Messiah will change the order of things about what is important and what is not.

It has been about 35 years since Cherie and I made a trip to Americus, Georgia to visit our friend, Ladon Sheats, who was a resident at Koinonia Partners. He was one of the leaders of the group along with Millard Fuller, the man who founded Habitat for Humanity. Both men had been very successful in their business careers, but they had chosen to leave it all behind for a life of service to the poor. When I asked Millard Fuller why he walked away from the millions of dollars he had earned as an entrepreneur, he said, *“Because my money was more important to me than the Kingdom of God.”*

Koinonia was building low cost housing for poor families in the Deep South at that time. Their vision eventually became what Habitat for Humanity is today. When I asked Millard Fuller why he was interested in providing housing for the poor, he said, *“Because that is what I understand to be consistent with the values of the Kingdom of God. If Jesus was the Messiah, then the Kingdom of God has already come, and the promises of God are not just for a select few. Everyone is supposed to have a fair chance to make it. I am just doing my part to be sure that the poor have a chance in life.”*

Habitat for Humanity has built more than 250,000 homes around the world providing more than a million people in over 3,000 communities with safe, decent, affordable shelter which they own for themselves. It is a witness to what one person can do when he believes that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that because he came the poor deserve the same opportunity as the rich.

Following a Child

The prophet also says that the human form in which the Messiah comes will surprise us. *“A Little Child shall lead them.”*

Jewish tradition says that children are a sign of hope. When Leonard Sweet commented on this passage he said, *“When you walk into a room full of four-year-olds, you just see children. You cannot pick out who will be the doctor and who will end up in jail. At four, there is an equal amount of promise in all of them—they can still do anything.”*

The prophet says that when the Messiah comes, we will see the world through the eyes of a child. A child does not understand why the lion and the lamb cannot lay down together. A child does not understand why hungry people cannot be fed, or why poor people have to lose a day’s pay in order to see a doctor. A child does not understand why Mommy and Daddy fight or why one hits the other when things don’t go their way. Children don’t make those kinds of rules. Adults do.

Herbert Hoover once said, *“Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity. Children are the most wholesome part of the race, the sweetest, for they are the freshest from the hand of God. Whimsical, ingenious, mischievous, they fill the world with joy and good humor/”*

*“When God wants a great work done in the world, or a great wrong righted, he goes about it in an unusual way. God doesn’t stir up earthquakes, or send forth thunderbolts. Instead, God has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home of some obscure mother. And then God puts the idea into the mother’s heart, and she puts it into the baby’s mind, and **then God waits.***