

Peace with Others Isaiah 11:1-10

I was in a long line in grocery store last week. It was so long that I got in line before I was even done shopping and I sent my son Otto on errands throughout the store to pick up items and bring them back while I held our place.

Am I the only one who ever does this?

There was a lady standing in front of me and she made this motion with her hand. I wasn't even sure she was talking to me and I so I stepped closer to see what she wanted. And with more urgency she made the same motion. And I leaned in and said, "I don't understand."

She yelled through her mask, "You're too close! Back up."

And so I did—a little bit stung. In the interest of breaking the tension because we were in this long line for a long time, I said after a minute or two, smiling under my mask "You know you can't get it from me anyway. I've already had it."

And she immediately shot back, "I don't think that's true."

And I said again trying and failing to be funny, "You mean that I had or COVID or you can't catch it?"

She replied, "How would I know if you've had it?"

So, I said wanting to just end the conversation, "I'll just keep my distance so you're safe."

She didn't respond and we kept standing there in line for another 15 minutes while Otto kept bringing me things from throughout the store.

Peace was hard to find in the grocery store line. There was very little shalom. It certainly did not feel like the way things are supposed to be.

This week the actor Tom Cruise and dedicated Scientologist made the news by going on a profanity-laced tirade while on the set of movie because he saw two crew members standing about three feet apart from one another rather than six. He said if he ever saw them do it again, they were fired. They actually both quit the very next day.

There was a story in the news this last week that interview people who were grateful for COVID precautions at Christmas because it was a convenient excuse, an easy out, to not get together with the family who voted for the Presidential candidate they did not.

I cannot remember a time in my life, any time, when we need peace more with others than right now. People are stressed, tired, afraid, uncertain, argumentative, suspicious, needy, sick and hurting.

There is very little shalom. It feels nothing like the way that things are supposed to be. We have reached our limit. We have had enough—whatever enough is. And it shows up in our relationships perhaps most of all—in our lack of peace with others.

God's people had also had enough. They taunted God with their disobedience and they tempted each other with their selfishness, lack of concern for each other and their negligence of the neediest among them. They were not only conflict with the Lord but they were in conflict with each other. Isaiah said they turned aside from doing justice to the needy, they robbed the poor. They took advantage of the widows and they didn't take of orphans and the fatherless.

And the Lord couldn't let this stand—as His people continued to break the Greatest Commandment—not only not loving Him with all their heart, mind and strength and not loving their neighbor as themselves.

It's very hard when people we love are cruel to each other. If you have ever been in a family conflict where people divide up and take sides or a church conflict where you see rumor spread like a contagion and long-standing friendships shattered and it breaks your heart, or even if you watch your children insult each other cruelly as kids often do, then you know a little bit about why watching people you love in conflict absolutely grieves God and He will not let it stand.

Right before our passage for today, God gave Isaiah a picture of how He was going to bring an end to the conflict. The Lord painted a picture of a great forest, green and tall as far as the eye could see. He said this forest was like how He created His people to be. And then He said:

Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.

Isaiah 10:33-34

The picture God gave of His people was like a forest that was sick and dying. God's people like the forest was undisciplined, unruly and unhealthy because of their sin. And so God razed it to the ground, just like He disciplined His people, totally removing them from the land He gave them—because they were rebellion against His Lordship and they were in unceasing conflict with each other.

But as God always does with us, He did not leave them hopeless. He did not tell them this was the end and that He would abandon them.

To understand the whole picture, imagine a forest that has been clear cut. **(insert picture)** You see sawed off white stumps as far as the eye can see. What once was a green and fertile land, teeming with life was now empty, barren and lifeless. It is very, very far from shalom, from peace, from the way things ought to be.

But its not without hope. After the devastation of God's discipline against an unruly people, there is hope for shalom, for peace. And it came in the form of a person.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Isaiah 11:1

This, as you may know, points directly to Jesus.

But who is Jesse?

Jesse is the father of King David—the Old Testament King of Israel, who was their greatest king. And David is seen as the forerunner to Jesus. Jesus and David are closely tied together, intimately linked. The very first line of Matthew’s Gospel says:

The book of genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.

Matthew 1:1

God’s solution to revitalize and renew the world is not a curriculum or a teaching or a great idea. God’s plan to bring shalom and peace to His weary and beaten down people is not to instruct us on what to do or how to live or a regimented program of self-improvement.

It’s a person. It is a relationship. One Man brings peace with God into the world and it spreads. One man comes in the name of righteousness and justice. This shoot from the stump of Jesse. This son of David, this Man of peace will be different:

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and 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 of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Isaiah 11:2-5

Of course, Isaiah wrote about 700 years before Jesus was born. But God gave Him multiple visions of what He would do, how Jesus would shape our hearts, be wounded and bloodied as payment for our sin, change the world, bring about the Kingdom of God, make all things new and reign forever and ever.

Jesus coming changes things.

I remember going Christmas shopping when I was I about 9 years old with my sister and my Grandpa Bucky. He was a Marine who was as tough nails and took no guff from anyone. He did what he wanted exactly how he wanted. As we walked around the store, wearing a big fur coat and a cowboy hat, he smoked a fat cigar—like he often did. Unlike today, there was no law against it but even as a 9-year-old I wondered, “Should he be doing that?”

A lady came up to us and asked him to put it out. He didn’t even make eye contact and just said, “No.” She didn’t give up. She followed him around the store telling him to put his cigar out. But she didn’t know who she was dealing with. Finally, my grandpa turned around and said, “Lady, why don’t you go bug someone else.” I cleaned up the language there a quite a bit—well, more than a bit. My sister and my mouths dropped at the words that came out of his mouth!

When we got home, my sister and I both immediately told my Grandmother about the whole juicy episode. And my grandmother read my Grandpa the riot act. She told him why he shouldn't smoke cigars in the store and how he needs to listen to other people and model being courteous to women for his grandchildren and not curse in front of them. And he rebuffed every one of her arguments—saying the lady was obnoxious and he wasn't breaking any law and the kids had heard those words before.

But then my Grandma said, "At Christmas a grown man should just know better!"

And my Grandpa knew he was beaten. He didn't respond.

My grandparents were not really church-going folk—but even they knew that Jesus coming into this world changes things. Jesus presence, His relationship with humanity, His coming changes things. Jesus just doesn't create peace in our relationship with God. Jesus' coming doesn't just bring shalom to our relationships with each other and He brings shalom into this world.

**The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.**

Isaiah 11:6-10

Now someone may read this passage and say what on earth does lion and a cow, getting along and a bear eating grass in a field like a horse have anything to do with having peace between people? And what does it have to do with Jesus making all things new?

By the way, as an aside, I don't care what condition creation is in or how much the animals are getting along—I am not getting anywhere near a cobra!

The great point Isaiah is making here is that with the coming of Jesus, no longer is anyone or anything in creation at odds with each other. When humanity sinned, it cursed creation, placing everyone at war and in conflict. Sin not only impacts our relationship with God, it fractures our relationship with other people and it curses the earth, changing it's character, lessening it. As humanity goes, so goes the world, including the animals. When God made us stewards of the world, He gave humanity real authority, world-changing power.

The British poet Tennyson wrote about God's creation and the fall:

**Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law—**

**Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed.**

Rejecting God's covenant of love has cursed His creation—drawing all of creation into conflict—even the animals who are innocent. Isaiah was given this vision of a world caught up in the peace that Jesus brings—unmitigated shalom—which is a redundant term.

So, Jesus has already come once. That's the event we are celebrating now. And we have a hint, a picture, just a little taste of what He will one day do.

How do we live at peace? How do we experience shalom? How do we get off this crazy cycle of conflict were on?

The key is to live in covenant rather than competition.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 12:18