Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Advent 2A
Peace, Seattle
December 5, 2010 epk
Isaiah 11:1-10 Matthew 3:1-12

IMAGINE

PRAYER: Open our imaginations to your vision of harmony. Grant us the will to move toward your vision with steps that are sure and true.

The Bible is full of poetry. And throughout this Advent season we sit at the feet of the best poet the Scriptures has to offer: the prophet Isaiah.

Now poetry, as we know, is different than prose. A poet says with a few words what a writer of prose takes pages to tell.

A good writer of poetry takes the raw produce of language and distills it into a potent potion that conveys the essence of the original materials in a powerful new form. Just a single drop goes a long way!

Stirring our hearts and minds this morning, Isaiah's poetry invites us to put aside skepticism and to take the risk of using our imaginations to dream with him God's own dream for the world.[1]

- A dream where a green shoot emerges from a bleak landscape and a child becomes a sign that the world is about to turn.

Expansive dreams are often birthed on the heels of big disasters, and there was no greater disaster than what Israel experienced at the hands of the Assyrians—the world's great superpower of that day. The Assyrians had come down on the northern kingdom with devastating power, carrying the people off into a captivity from which they would never return.

Then, turning their eyes southward, they marched to within a few miles of Jerusalem, threatening to bring upon Judah the same fate. Like the forest after a Mt. St. Helen's blast, the nation had been mowed down, leaving destruction as far as the eye could see; setting the stage for the question:

Do God's remnant people have a future?

Onto this canvas of gray ash and desolation Isaiah throws the bright colors of hope:

A SHOOT, Isaiah says, SHALL COME OUT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE, A BRANCH SHALL GROW OUT OF ITS ROOTS. AND THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SHALL REST ON HIM.

A slender, green branch-of-a-hope pushes its way upward through the debris, through the ash of desolation and into the sunlight. Then, against great odds, the root not only survives, but begins to grow and even, to thrive.

This dream of Isaiah comes at a fragile time in his people's history.
Powerful forces have cut it them down from the outside.
A string of unjust and self-seeking rulers has depleted the soil of renewal from within.

In the midst of these threats from without and within, Isaiah dares to describe a time when God's execution of judgment will turn into a dream for justice, for wholeness, and for harmony.

[1] Robert Kysar, *New Proclamation Series A* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) p.10.

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Do we dare trust this dream? Do we dare to make it our own?

It's no coincidence that Isaiah's dream also includes a little child. Children haven't lost their ability, like so many of us adults, to meet the world with certified belief in possibility.

Did you notice the child in today's text? He's there in verse 6 with wolves and lambs, and shows up again at the Cobra's den. Hardly places we'd approve of children playing…yet, God doesn't seem to be worried.

This child of Isaiah's poetry ushers in an age which takes us back to Eden, back to God's sweet intentions for this newly created world, and dares us to dream that such is world is possible once again.

In the first book of the Harry Potter series[2] there is a mirror that is different than any other—the mirror of Erised. When you gaze into this mirror, instead of seeing your own image you see the deepest longings of your heart revealed.

When Harry looks into the mirror, his sees his mother and father, long dead, embracing him with their arms and smiles. This scene of their reunion so captivates Harry that he wants to spend all his time there in front of the mirror, wishing his life away. But the insight of a mentor helps him understand that if he spends his life gazing into that mirror he will never attain the sense of belonging he seeks.

The prophet Isaiah held up a mirror, of sorts, to God's people. This mirror showed them the truth about their unfaithful lives, rather than what they wanted it to see.

But that's not the only thing he showed them. In this mornings reading, Isaiah's mirror takes on a new function. It unveils for God's people a vision of the future which inspires them, and us, to return to trusting, to hold on to truth, and to believe that God's dream for the world is not mere fantasy.

We take this mirror of Isaiah into our own hands every time we baptize in our community, for we use language straight out of Isaiah's dream to bless the lives of those whom have been washed in the waters.

We pray for God's Spirit to be poured out upon them.
- The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- the spirit of counsel and might,
- the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD,
- the spirit of joy in God's presence.

And that new child of God, that new life, leads us to place ourselves in a world where <u>leopards</u> play tag with lambs, <u>lions</u> become vegetarians, and where the <u>waters of rebirth</u> so shape our communities that there simply is no opportunity for harm or hurt to enter.

Isaiah dreamed that one day a leader would be born who would embody all these godly attributes, who would bring heaven and earth, humanity and nature together again.

[2] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. (New York: Scholastic, 1998)

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

It is this same vision that inspired John the Baptist, the Forerunner, to keep his eyes peeled for the One to come, and the gospel declares that this dream became a reality in Jesus of Nazareth.

Like Isaiah, John reminds us that there is no negotiating with God.
Only a complete and unconditional surrender to God's will and purposes will do.

The Bible's name for that reorientation is metanoia—repentance.

A few years back I was on the boat on they way up to Holden Village when I met a guy who'd just purchased a new GPS, global positioning system. It was about the size of a cell phone.

GPS's are old hat now—every smart phone and new car has one—but not long ago this was cutting edge. As we sat on the back deck of Lady of the Lake, he told me how the GPS communicated with three orbiting satellites, enabling him to identify with incredible accuracy, his current position, in latitude and longitude, anywhere in the world.

When our conversation ended, he walked from the back deck into the cabin with his eyes glued to the GPS, tripped on the threshold and fell flat on the floor.

He had oriented himself to his global position, but he wasn't paying attention to the limits and landscape that surrounded his real life in the present moment.

John's message of repentance, like that of Isaiah, is a call to re-orient, to reverse course, to turn our lives around and turn them over into God's hands.

The gospel proclaims that it is in this turning that we finally come face to face with God incarnate, and in seeing him, our lives—mirrored now in his—come into true focus.

As we look at one another and our world through this lens and mirror of Jesus, we are able to see ourselves as the persons that God intends us to be, and seeing, we move, through the Spirit's power, toward that vision, step by step.

It's not a small thing this vision we are called to inhabit. And by ourselves it is impossible. But we are not alone. The Christ who called us into this community meets us at his Table each week offering to nurture and nourish the dream.

"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."

Let it be so. Amen.