

**Is There Any Room for Peace?  
Isaiah 11:1-10  
Second Sunday of Advent  
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The great prophet, George Carlin, once famously pointed out that our homes are really just the place we keep our stuff. That really is all our houses are! Places to keep our stuff, which we lock up while we go out and get more stuff! And our stuff will expand to fit the size of our house. And then we get a storage unit to keep our stuff!<sup>1</sup>

We get used to our stuff--where it is, how it is arranged. Which may be why it is so disconcerting when it is moved or altered. Even in good ways.

When we moved we did a major cleaning out! There were boxes of stuff in our attic in Charleston that we had placed there 20 year earlier and never moved! There were things that we had kept just because we didn't want to go through the work of throwing them away.

But....when you are moving you have to decide! What to take and what to discard!

If only!

Even now we find ourselves going through boxes and asking ourselves, "Why did we bring this?" This summer as we prepared for our guests to come we were going through rooms, cleaning up and cleaning out! As we went through boxes Anita declared "*We have too much stuff*,"--although that wasn't the word she used. I think it was crap!

We have too much stuff. If we are going to have people come to our house, we have to do something with our stuff.

As we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, we have to struggle with the same thing. We are really excited about his coming, about the gifts he will bring. But is there any room in our lives for them? Is there any room in our lives for peace?

It seems like a no-brainer! Of course we want peace! Who wouldn't? We love the verses from Isaiah we heard this morning--"*The wolf will lie down 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.*" We love that famous picture by the Quaker preacher, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. We love the idea that there will come a day when swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. We dream of a world in which war is just ancient history, where warfare is just a myth. We yearn for a news broadcast where conflicts near and far are not the central story; where crime news isn't always the lead. We hope for a life in which the battles we fight with family, with neighbors, are no more.

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<sup>1</sup> You can watch this prophet at his best here. Note--it is not recommended that you use this in church! It is George Carlin! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvgN5gCuLac>

Oh we so want peace in our world, in our lives. But is there any room for peace? Are we willing to make room for it?

When Isaiah wrote these words the nation was in shambles. King Ahaz had been a disaster. The nation was divided north and south; there were warring nations standing in the doorway ready to barge in; it seemed that the dreams of a peaceable kingdom, of any kingdom had been cut down. All that was left was the stump of a dream. Most were ready to move on, to give up.

But Isaiah had another vision, one rooted in God. But for it to take root, in the people, in us, there are some things that must be removed.

We have to get rid of our old grudges. I recall a Doonesbury cartoon from several years ago. An American soldier was driving with an Iraqi in the passenger seat. The Iraqi said, *"That man there! I hate him! He killed my family!"* The American replied, *"What? When?"* *"300 years ago!"* the Iraqi said! *"I don't understand you people,"* stated the American!

But we do! In a world where it is difficult to remember what happened last week we have an amazing ability to recall something that happened to offend us years ago. How many of us are still angry, hurt over a break up, some offense from high school? A word was said, feelings were hurt, relationships destroyed and we have never forgotten. We have never forgiven. And we won't! We can't let go. And because we can't, won't let it go, there can be no room in our lives for any peace.

If we want peace, we have to be willing to remove old grudges, to forgive ancient, recent hurts. Several years ago Anita and I had the opportunity to go to South Africa, spending a few days in Cape Town. While we were there we took the trip out to Robben Island, the infamous prison where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for nearly 3 decades. We were able to see his cell--a small area not as large as this podium. On the floor was a small mat, about an inch thick which served as his bed. There was a pot that served as the bathroom.

And that was his world for nearly 27 years. 27 years--almost half of my lifetime. 27 years--cut off from family, from news, from future. 27 years of working in a rock quarry for what? Because he fought to overthrow South Africa's apartheid government. Because he was black. Because he dared talk about equality for all people.

What does that do to a person? What would it do to you? The fact that Mandela came out alive is a miracle. The fact that he emerged with a soul not seeking revenge...what do you declare that? Instead he spent the rest of his life working for and with all South Africans--even those who had imprisoned him. He had a dream for his country, for a good country but insisted that the way was named forgiveness and goodness. Even more he knew he had to forgive. He said, *"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."* And so will we all.

Mandela taught his nation, and the world, that if we are to find peace--as nations, as individuals, we have to be willing to let go old grudges and forgive. Nelson Mandela was the living embodiment of not allowing the past to determine our future.

We also have to be willing to get rid of our inequalities. This is the season in which we get ready for the coming of the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel. But do we really want him to come? Did you hear how Isaiah describes his work? *“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.”* Equity is the standard. Some translate this passage by saying God will judge for the poor. God is biased. God is always, always on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

So we have to wonder what God must think about the growing inequity in our world. While it isn't as extreme here in Canada as it is for our neighbors down south, it is a growing concern.

It is a financial concern as many economists see this growing inequality as a drag on global economic growth. It is a security issue. A recent article in Forbes magazine stated that economic inequality must be addressed before the next social revolution occurs, adding, it may well be headed our way.<sup>2</sup>

We only have to look at history to understand that this kind of inequality threatens the peace of our world. Look at the French Revolution, the Russian revolution--driven by economic disparities. Look to recent years to the Arab Spring, the turmoil in Venezuela, in France and Spain and you understand how economics can drive people to the streets. Our security demands that we address the inequalities.

But more than that, much more than that, this disparity is a moral issue. Pope Francis, in the first speech of his papacy addressed our financial system, inequality and capitalism. He said,

*Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root.<sup>3</sup>*

The economic disparity serves to make our world less peaceful as it builds walls and barriers that separate us. Some times they are physical fences--built to keep people out. (Where have we heard that?) At other times they are psychological barriers--feelings of inferiority that we just won't be welcomed, that we just don't belong. Feelings of guilt, of fear because of the poverty around us. Those divisions just make us all less open, less safe. Too often our wealth, or lack of it, keep peace from having a place to grow.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/shahgilani/2013/09/27/income-inequality-is-whats-destroying-america/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-pope-on-the-financial-system-inequality-money-2013-11>

If we want peace, real peace in our world, we have to get rid of our economic inequalities, we have to let go of our grudges. And we have to let go of our fears.

That may be the hardest. We are so afraid of changing the economic realities because we are afraid that we will have less. We are afraid of letting go of our grudges because we might look weak. We are so afraid!

And Isaiah recognizes that! He was aware of the natural tendencies of this world. That is why he used the wonderful image that we have come to love. Lion and calves lying down together. We love the image--but really? Woody Allen says that the lion and the lamb (mixing up verses like we all do because they sound better together) the lion and the lamb will lie down together, but the lamb won't get a lot of sleep! The sheep is terrified of the lion!

And we have so many fears don't we? Fear of those things that are real, and those that are imagined. Fears of those things that happen, and those that don't. We live in a world where we are taught to be afraid--of child abductions, of violent crime, of shootings, of....

It is the stuff that sells papers and gets eyes on the evening news. To listen, you would think that we live in a violent world! And there is violence--but the truth, the facts are that violent crime continues to decline in our nation. Children are abducted--but usually by family members. People are killed--but again, usually by family members!

And yet we are afraid--of them. Of others.

Our fears take up so much room in our souls--we are afraid of others, we are afraid of God. Is it any surprise that there is no room for peace to grow?

Are we willing to dig a small hole and at least plant the seeds?

When she was younger, Savannah liked to dig holes--and I mean holes. The kind that would eat a small dog; the kind that would break your leg if you discovered it in the dark! And always in the middle of the yard where the good grass grew!

One day, when she was about 7-8 she dug a hole and stuck a stick in it. It was a stick--nothing more. She dug the hole, stuck the stick in and just covered it up. We left it there--to be nice.

When we moved here, that stick was a tree in our backyard--about to take over!

Oh, what can happen if we just give it some room!

Peace!

What a wonderful word, what a fabulous idea. All we are saying, is give peace a chance--a really good song!

But do we have any room in our lives for peace? Are we willing to make room, to dig a hole, and see what might happen?

Or are we afraid of what might happen if peace became a reality?

It will come! That is the gospel! There will come a day when fears will be extinguished, when the disparities will be eliminated, when all will be forgiven. It will come when God's kingdom comes.

Oh, might it be today in us!