

We are going to continue in our series, “Do Unto Others”. Today we are going to look at the idea of compassion through the lens of the Golden Rule. The rule that says....

Do Unto Others as you would have them to do unto you.

Compassion. It’s a word that comes to us from Latin. The origins mean...Suffer with. I don’t know about you, but I would rather suffer from afar, not with.

Edward Hicks was a famous painter from the 18th Century. One of his most famous works is called, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. The painting is based on verses 1-10 of Isaiah chapter 11.



Let’s take a look at this painting for a moment, because it captures the true message that Isaiah was trying to convey. We see a lion, a leopard, a tiger, a wolf and a bear. Alongside these we also see a cow, a goat, a sheep and several other small animals. Notice that all of these animals are wide-eyed as if in wonder that they’re all together. They are also gathered with three small children, one near school-age, the other two apparently helpless toddlers. All look happy and contented. The children have at least one hand on a dangerous animal. In the background you will notice something of equal weight and importance. In the distance, behind the children and animals, you can see a group of Native Americans and several Anglo “settlers.” They represent William Penn, the founder of Quakerism in America, and his group as they negotiated with the Lenni-LÉnape tribe in the Great Treaty of 1682. All of these people are separated from the children and animals by a wide ravine and there is a forked tree – apparently struck by lightning in the background.

There is great symbolism in Hicks' work. There is a huge chasm or ravine between where we are – where we live – and the “peaceable kingdom,” about which Isaiah speaks. On one side of the chasm are the warring people of the world, who even if they espouse peaceful beliefs, tend to make and break treaties on whims and who typically exhibit tendencies of little or no justice recognition. That is true of many people – even Hicks' beloved Quakers. On the other side of the ravine is that place promised to us by God, through Isaiah. In the Kingdom of God, little children are never in any danger. Animals don't have to fight with each other – or eat each other in order to survive. Lions and wolves eat hay, just like the cows and sheep. And people are **only** interested in peace and justice. But that forked tree in the background says something about our nature. We have broken away from the beauty, wonder and goodness of God's creation and branched out on our own.

The writer of the Book of Isaiah wrote about this peaceable kingdom almost 3,000 years ago. And we're no closer to making it a reality today than the people of Israel were then. We would like to think we have it worse. But let's look at the days of Isaiah. They were on the brink of war. On the brink of being exiled to a strange land. Their methods of war were different then. When people went to war, they met each other on a battlefield and fought hand-to-hand for the ground they wanted to occupy. They would look into each other's eyes and see the cost of their struggles. They could visibly decide whether or not the war was worth the cost.

Today, although that close-quarter combat has **not** completely gone away, we have new ways of killing each other. In astronomical numbers from miles away, literally at the push of a button. It doesn't take much browsing through social media posts or watching TV to determine that peace has **not** broken out on earth, as of October 20th, 2024.

Fact is, there are a couple of wars raging in the world today. Neither looks as though they will end soon.

Despite Isaiah's prophecy of children touching deadly snakes without injury, children on earth do not live in safety today, any more than they did in Isaiah's time. According to the United Nations, 25,000 people per day – that's 1 every 3.5 SECONDS – die of hunger related causes, a large part of these numbers are children. We haven't gotten much closer to Isaiah's vision of children living in safety.

In Arizona in 2020, 76,000 reports were made to Child Protective Services because someone was afraid for the safety of a child. More than half of those reports were referred on for investigation.

This is so far removed from the idea of the wolf living with lamb or the leopard living with the kid. No. We're no closer to the peaceable kingdom than Isaiah was.

So where are we? Were all of these visions of Isaiah's just myths or figments of his imagination?

Let's remember something very important. Because if we look back earlier in this passage, we will see that things needed to happen **before** the peaceable kingdom could come.

Verse 1-3: 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.

Who in the world is Isaiah talking about? Yes Isaiah was talking about the birth of Jesus. But in the verses, we read today, Isaiah also speaks of the world after *parousia* – the second coming of Christ. Church family, doesn't one thing relate to the other?

When Jesus was involved in His earthly ministry, he often talked about the Kingdom of God. With the birth of Jesus, the Kingdom of heaven indeed came near. But when Christ Jesus comes

again, it will not simply be in the judgment with which so much of Christians concerns themselves. Obsess about.

What if a worldwide Armageddon was never part of God's ultimate plan for salvation. What if when Christ Jesus returns, it will be in great glory. What if Jesus judges with, in Isaiah's words, righteousness. What if Jesus will "*decide with equity for the meek of the earth.*"

In Isaiah's world we see...The One who truly has the Spirit of the Lord resting on Him, the One who lives in knowledge and fear of the Lord. That the One who IS the shoot from the stump of Jesse, is the only One who can and will usher in the peaceable kingdom on earth.

But church family, we aren't being asked to stand around and wait for this to happen. We are not being asked to wring our hands and worry because we're not ready. No, that is not the message for today. Isaiah is suggesting that we take his peaceful description and use it as an example, as a pattern, And with that we need to get to work. After all, in this Peaceable Kingdom, don't you see it? It's compassion, that rules and reigns. It's what we can expect when the wonderful day of the peaceable kingdom arrives.

We keep waiting for that day and yet, Isaiah says that it is the Kingdom of God that comes to us. And when it does, there will be righteousness and fear of the Lord everywhere. The Spirit of God and the fear of the Lord that will usher in God's fulfillment of all creation. We cannot make the peaceable kingdom appear throughout the earth. But here is what we CAN do.

We commit to living as if the Spirit of the Lord was truly alive and well within us – because that is a fact and we say it every time we baptize anyone and we relive it every time we come for communion. Church family, we ARE Spirit-filled members of the Body of Christ, so let's living as if we are. That means living in knowledge and fear of the Lord. It doesn't mean trembling and cowering at God's name, it means knowing that God is God and **we are NOT**. It means knowing the true, active power of God in the world and recognizing it for what it is – not coincidence, not natural occurrence, but power!

When we begin to live out the promises of God in Christ in our everyday lives, we will bring the hope of the peaceable kingdom to our churches, our homes, our workplaces, and our community. When we decide that peaceable kingdom is where we live and where we work and where we share communion with each other, what do you think will come from that?

Think about the idea of a “viral video?” They happen quite simply. Usual from an individual with a cell phone camera. The video is uploaded to a social site like Instagram or Tic Tok. Once it’s uploaded, someone sees it and forwards a link to a friend, and tells someone else about it, and they go to the web site and see it, and so on, and so on. This process is repeated hundreds of thousands of times in a day. That’s how you find an Instagram post of a rabbit attacking a snake and running the snake out of the yard. Something like that can end up with almost 3 million views. When a video goes viral, it spreads like wildfire.

So ... what if we started living into the compassionate “peaceable kingdom,” individually. What if we then became living examples of the disciples of Jesus Christ and other people started to notice? What if people asked themselves, “why is that person so at peace in this crazy world?” And what if the answer was, “she lives in the knowledge and fear of the Lord.” Let’s create our own local peaceable kingdom. Let’s do it by showing compassion to anyone and everyone. Maybe, just maybe, that’ll go viral. Something to think about. Sounds like the Golden Rule to me.

Let us pray.