



Advent Reflection for Saturday, December 9, 2023

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Isaiah 11:1-9

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.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
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 around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed 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 asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
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.

Today's Reflection is by Colleen Lang

I have been held hostage more than a few times to watch my two sons play Minecraft, and I usually give a pretty poor performance of interest. Yet, even as it pains me to think about the amount of time on screens that it has taken, I have had moments of feeling a little impressed with the skill level my sons have gotten to, particularly in "Survivor" mode of the game, which is focused on building and accruing resources to survive a number of imposing threats: creepers, angry mobs, strange little figures called 'endermen.' Of these threats, the Wither Storm is the most imposing; my sons' skills cannot yet contend with it. The Wither Storm is a dark storm so massive and powerful, it demolishes almost all structures and creatures in its path; what's more, the storm consumes everything it destroys, and as such, has the power to become bigger and ever more threatening as it lurches across the screen. If I am to be honest, even in the cartoon fantasy of this videogame I have watched for hours but still cannot profess to understand, the Wither Storm scares me.

It seems to me that war is a Wither Storm. We see it tearing through Gaza right now, tornadoing homes, hospitals, lives, picking up speed and strength as it rages, its destruction causing heartbreak and fear on both sides that most of us will never know. Like all storms, the Wither presents in smaller scales, too, yet too frequently. It enters human relationships, often showing up as a painful emotion, breeding on lack of mindfulness and the presence of assumption. As a therapist, I see it threaten the lives of people in my office all of the time, couples or family members sitting together trying to move through hurt and anger, the storm of emotions darkening hearts and pushing people into their own agendas.... away from each other. Slamming doors and silence, grit teeth and rolling eyes, insults and ignoring. What it destroys it also consumes: trust, safety, memories and emotional investments that people have made to each other - all of it becoming angry, hurtful words and attacks that are then themselves used as weapons, storms that pick up speed and casualties as they are continually fed. Sadly, such a storm is brewing now within my own extended family. A week ago, words were misunderstood, miscommunicated and then weaponized; emotions tumbled on themselves between two people, becoming stronger as exchanges continued. And then, fortified, the Wither stood foreboding in front of other relationships within the family, too; in fact, it still looms, and I am unsure sometimes how my family members are going to stand to it. I am definitely unsure, and scared, of how the Wither will be stood down in Gaza.

Yet, this passage gives hope. It reminds us that there is a far greater power: the spirit of the Lord resting upon Jesse, promising wisdom, understanding, counsel and might. A spirit so powerful, he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. A spirit that promises to restore all back to goodness and a goodness that cannot be hurt nor destroyed. A goodness that seems very clearly defined within this passage as unity. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard

with the kid, and the cow and the bear shall graze. And this, the almost unthinkable, scientifically infeasible, in fact, kind of unity, between predators and prey and the most unlikely of creatures to be compatible, the result of faith and righteousness.

What strikes me about this passage, particularly as we have become all too aware of human divisiveness and its collateral, both on global and personal scales, is how powerful we know the spirit of the Lord to be, and yet, as available as it is to us, to all of us, that we do not always accept it. If God can be in all of us, a power that can be spread and shared between us at the ready, a power this awesome, why don't we more easily relent to it? What do we hold onto and what are we scared of that makes us more willing to relent instead to the darkness of the storms that destroy us? Why do we live in such division with one another when the power of God is right before us for the taking?

We can seek to protect our land, our points of view or our principles, and yet, what is defended is so seldom worth what gets destroyed. In Minecraft, fighting the Wither Storm only gives it more ammunition. I don't know what the answer is for defeating the videogame, or any videogame for that matter, but I do think that in life, accepting the spirit means letting go of the fight. Which takes faith that what we get instead is so much better: to live in unity, alongside and with people who want what we have, have what we want, think differently from us, and who have resources, beliefs and feelings that do not, in fact, have to challenge our own, but can coexist. As a therapist and a human in a world that includes war and the heartbreak of personal fighting, it seems to me, perhaps simplified, that laying down our arms is an act of faith in the inherent validity and goodness in the factions we otherwise fight. It is to see each other accurately, without the blinding cataracts of emotion and self interest, with vision clarified instead by the spirit of God. To allow the shoot to become a branch that heals and quiets, is to choose to see each other with love. And here we may find so much more power, a power of peace rather than destruction, a power that doesn't hurt but heals, and a power that is waiting for us and can fill the earth if we let it.



Colleen and her husband Eduardo live in Windsor Terrace with their sons Sebastian and Lucas. They all feel lucky to have been welcomed by the Holy Apostles community about five years ago.