

Good morning everyone. This is the second week of our brand new “Do Unto Others” series. If you missed last week I would highly recommend you go to the church’s facebook page or youtube channel and check it out. Pastor Gina’s message on kindness has continued to work on me in powerful ways throughout this past week. So much so I had to capture the red, blue, and purple theme in what I wore this morning. Today we are exploring the theme of compassion and to do so we’re reading from Isaiah 11:6-9:

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb;
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
 the calf and the lion will feed[b] together,
 and a little child shall lead them.
 7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.
 9 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.

Beautiful imagery right?

Probably the most often quoted verse within this passage is, “The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together. The cow and the bear will graze together and their young will lie down together. They will not harm or destroy on my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Reading and rereading these verses from Isaiah over the last couple of weeks preparing for this morning’s message I kept having two different songs pop into my head. One was, “I Can Only Imagine” by Christian recording artists’ Merge Me. I can only imagine God’s peaceable kingdom...we’re going to come back to this in a few minutes.

The other song was not from the world of Christian music but rather from the Beach Boys from 1966. “Wouldn’t it be nice?”

Wouldn’t it be nice...

If the wolf lived with the lamb

if the leopard laid down with the kid
 if the calf and the lion feed together
 Wouldn't it be nice...

if conservatives and liberals and everyone in between could respect each other and
 have productive dialogue so we could all move forward together for the good of all
 if we celebrated the diversity of all of God's people and not look at one another as a
 threat

if palestinians, jews, syrians, lebanese, iranians, saudis, iraqis, would stop killing each
 other long enough to come together to honestly and openly listen to each with open
 ears, open minds, and open hearts.

if Russians and Ukrainians could live in peace and prosperity.

Wouldn't it be nice...

Some of the other lyrics of that song go like this:

Wouldn't it be nice to live together in the kind of world where we all belong?

Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray it might come true.

**You know it seems like the more the more we talk about it, it only makes it worse
 to live without it.**

Wouldn't it be nice...of course it would be nice.

But in the meantime our world continues to be fraught with violence, conflict, war,
 inequality, injustice, hatred and hate-filled rhetoric, the demonization of the other,
 prejudice, bigotry, and the like.

I'm so tired...no the better word is weary...I'm so weary of all of the above and more.

I'm weary of hearing it, I'm weary of seeing it, but mostly I'm weary that so many in our
 world experience some of these, all of these, day after day, after day, after day.

But you know, and what I'm about to say doesn't make things better... violence, conflict,
 war, inequality, injustice, hatred and hate-filled rhetoric, the demonization of the other,
 prejudice, bigotry, and the like is nothing new...they have been part of the human
 condition for what seems like forever.

The Bible is full of examples of every single one of the maladies we've named. We
 don't even get out of the fourth chapter for the first book of the Bible: Genesis before
 Cain kills Abel over jealousy.

In fact, God gives Isaiah this powerful image of the peaceable kingdom not during a
 time of peace and prosperity for the Israelites. Actually, its just the opposite: Assyria
 (the only true global super power of its day) was right on Israel's doorstep about to
 invade and conquer putting the people of Israel squarely under the thumb of a foreign
 ungodly invader. Israel was not about to live into God's peaceable kingdom!

Perhaps God chose this time to give Israel the vision of God's Peaceable Kingdom to give them a sense of hope. "I know things are bad right now but there will come a day when, "The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together."

I wonder how many of the people of Israel said to themselves..."Wouldn't it be nice..." or "I can only imagine."

I said we'd come back to "I can only imagine" and I do so because it might just be the aha, or key to moving forward into a new compassionate, kinder future; one that begins to embody God's peaceable kingdom here on earth.

As we just eluded to, as human beings, we've been suffering with violence, conflict, war, hatred, etc., etc. since forever. And because of that maybe the other thing we suffer from is a lack of imagination.

When we think of a peaceable kingdom, wouldn't it be nice if:

- conservatives and liberals and everyone in between respected each other and have productive dialogues so we could all move forward together for the good of all
- we would celebrate the diversity of all of God's people and not look at each another as a threat.
 - wouldn't it be nice if we saw palestinians, jews, syrians, lebanese, iranians, saudis, iraqis, christians, jews, muslims, no longer killing each other but rather coming together to honestly and openly listen to each other and working together to solve the common problems they all face.
- Can we truly and honestly imagine all or any of those scenarios?

If human beings have been fighting, lying, killing, at war, enslaving, belittling, demeaning, and just treating each other poorly since practically the beginning of time what chance do we have to see and experience anything different? When we ask "wouldn't it be nice" is it no more than just wishful thinking?

I think it can be...and, more importantly than that, I believe it's the deep desire of God's broken heart.

and so we have God's vision of a peaceable kingdom in Isaiah 11. But we also have other places in scripture where we get a clear indication of what and how God would have us act and behave as followers of Jesus.

There are two places in the sermon on the mount (Matthew) where Jesus tells us:

"Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."

"You have heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemies, but I say, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Blessed are the peacemakers and love your enemies...really Jesus? Have you been paying attention? Where's that going to get us? The next thing you'll be telling us is to treat others in the same way we want to be treated!

So friends...what do we do with all this?

Do we walk away from our time together this morning feeling dejected and discouraged with the words of the Beach Boys echoing in our ears:

“You know it seems like the more the more we talk about it, it only makes it worse to live without it.”

How can we begin to lean into and/or live into this call to kindness and compassion...this call to “Do unto others?”

- I can’t stop the war in the Ukraine or in the Middle East
- I can’t force politicians into civil discourse instead of hate-filled rhetoric
- When I look at these large global issues I can’t think of anything I can do that will make one bit of difference.

But then this mantra keeps coming back to me:

“Don’t let what you can’t do keep you from doing what you can do!”

So here’s what God has laid on my heart to do in response to this message and this series:

- (1) I’m going to be a peacemaker in every and all situations that I find myself—no matter how uncomfortable it might be. And when I mess up and don’t get it right, I’m going to start back doing it all over again...praying for the strength and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to know what’s right.
- (2) I’m going to pray for the world, especially those place and people I believe are doing harm and ushering in the very antithesis of God’s Peaceable Kingdom in the world.
- (3) I’m going to speak out against hatred, prejudice, injustice, when I see it and to do so in a way that fosters understanding, and awareness.
- (4) I’m inviting each and everyone of you to do the same in your own way.

That might not sound like much...but its what I can do.

As I commit do doing what I can I’m reminded of a Chinese Proverb that says, “The flapping wings of a butterfly can be felt on the other side of the world.”

and of a modern proverb from Max Planck, “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if we lived in a world where everyone belonged!

