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## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT

DECEMBER 8, 2013

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### THE LION SHALL EAT STRAW LIKE THE OX

Pastor Jim Dunn

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#### **Isaiah 11:1-10**

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

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“The cow and the bear will graze the same pasture; their calves and cubs will grow up together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” (Isaiah 11:7, The Message)

If two different worlds collide, we assume that the one knows very little about the other. For example, what does a preacher know about the life of being a soldier in the army? What does a movie actress know about the life of a mechanic working in a garage repairing cars and motorcycles? What does a wild bear know about grazing with tame cattle? What does a wild lion know about eating from the same trough with a tame ox? Very little, we would say.

But that doesn't mean the two different worlds never meet. Sometimes, preachers become army chaplains. Sometimes, movie actresses like Sandra Bullock marry mechanics like that wild man Jesse James. Sometimes, the wild world from out there crashes against our tame existence. Hardly a day goes by that we don't hear about a rattlesnake biting somebody, or an attack on a human by a gator, or a scary encounter with a black bear or a polar bear, or the deadly effects upon humans by diseases carried by mosquitoes.

The wild world from out there does collide with our tame world. Here in the Midwest, that collision is between the farmers and the wild hogs. Not to be confused with your domestic hog, the wild hog is often part wild boar, has tusks, a straight tail, and a ridge of hair along its back, giving rise to the nickname razorback. Wild hogs live together in large groups, and one large group can devour a farmer's whole crop in just a few nights. Losses to farmers last year due to the wild hog have been estimated at one and a half billion dollars. That doesn't include possible damage they cause due to the diseases they carry, like swine cholera.

The nuisance that wild hogs pose to humans and livestock means hunters have been given license to kill as many as they can any way that they can. Wild hogs are intelligent, though. They have been known to scope out traps for days before sending in the group's lowest ranking members to test for danger. So, hunters have reformed the way they go after the wild hog. This involves the use of a "Judas pig." Which means, upon capturing and killing a wild hog family, hunters will leave one sow alive.

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They will outfit her with a microchip or a tracking collar. So they can track her, using GPS. Then, they set the sow free. Then they wait until she finds a new group of wild hogs to join, and then the hunters descend upon the unsuspecting hogs.

Sounds like a war. That's how it is when the wild world collides with our own. Whether it's big wild hogs attacking our crops or a microscopic virus attacking our body, the wild world crashing against us reminds us that there is a war going on against sin and evil. It's going on even inside of us, inside our bodies, inside our minds, inside our souls. In this war against sin and evil, we are dependent and we are fragile. The wild world crashing against us is like a wakeup call. It's like a signpost pointing us to God who is greater than we are. The wild world crashing against us is like a call to repentance.

That doesn't mean merely changing our ways the way that hunters have changed the way they hunt wild hogs. Repentance is more than reforming your ways or changing your ways. A sinner can be reformed and still be lost. Repentance is more than identifying a particular sin and hunting it down to the point of extinction. Repentance is turning for help to the One who is greater than we are. Repentance is turning for help to Jesus.

Turning to anyone for help, though, is a different world for most of us. It's foreign to us. Turning to anyone for help is foreign to us. Turning to Jesus for help? We think of Him as far removed from the situation. What does Jesus know about my world, my problems? Very little, we think to ourselves.

But that doesn't mean our two worlds never meet. The picture in Isaiah 11, of the lion eating straw like the ox, reminds us of places in the Bible where Jesus is spoken of as a lion. In Hosea 11:10 it says, "They will follow the Lord. The Lord will roar like a lion." In Revelation 5:5 it reads: "Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed." This Lion of Judah, Jesus, came to your little world. Heaven collided with earth. God's Son from heaven was born down here, and shared your nature, and shared your life. He became flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone. He experienced your joys, your emotions, your hardships, your temptations, your work, your play, your routines, even your food.

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In a sense, this Lion ate “straw like the ox.” The Son of God from heaven ate what we humans eat. The Son of God from heaven walked in your shoes. The Son of God from heaven slept in your bed. The Son of God from heaven lived through everything you have to live through. So what does the Son of God from heaven know about your little world, your problems? More than you think.

He knows that you won't turn to Him for help on your own. So out of love, He re-creates you. By the power of His creating Word, you are born anew. Think again about the lion eating straw like the ox. Here you have a ferocious, carnivorous predator passing up the chance to devour its prey. Instead, this lion eats the same thing its prey eats: straw.

Now, that's not your typical wild lion. That's an animal that has been re-created. As you have been re-created. Christ Himself re-creates you. Christ Himself transforms you. You are born anew in Baptism by the promise of peace. Peace between God and you because your sins have been taken away. Peace between you and God that depends not on you turning to God, because He turned to you and gave His Son to walk in your shoes, to carry your sins, to be devoured at the cross by sin and evil instead of you.

Peace between God and you. Peace that empowers you to turn to Jesus for help when you're tempted. Peace that empowers you to not only turn away from a particular sin but also to repent, to bear the fruit of repentance, the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. Peace between God and you, like the peace pictured here between the lion and the ox. In fact, in every nativity scene, next to the shepherds and the Wise Men and the donkey and the sheep and the ox there should be a lion, a bear, a leopard, a wolf, a cobra, and an adder. For on the Last Day there will be peace between wild animals and tame animals, “the cow and the bear will graze the same pasture,” there will be peace between farmers and wild hogs, “the nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens,” because Jesus, the Son of God, the Lion of Judah, the Prince of Peace, has already brought peace between heaven and earth, between God and you.

Amen.