In the Old Testament passages that we read earlier from the prophet Isaiah, we came across a familiar Advent season text presenting a series of unusual signs and imageries of wild animals that don’t seemingly make much logical sense, nevertheless somehow, someway, they find their way to live in harmony and in peace with one another. We have the **wolf**, living with the **lamb**; the **leopard** lying down with the **goat**, the **calf** and the **lion**, the **cow** feeding with the **bear**, the **lion** eating straw with the **ox**; and an **infant** playing over the **cobra**’s nest. There will be no hurt or destruction in God’s holy mountain and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is too good to be true!

 In the midst of this menagerie of God’s creations that don’t seemingly to quite fit in with one another, we have a little child – a little child leading the way and pointing the way towards **peace and harmony among all of God’s creations**.

 There was a famous painting that was done by the early 19th century Quaker artist Edward Hicks. The title of this painting is called ***The Peaceable Kingdom***. The artist was inspired by the Isaiah passage that we read earlier, illustrating the utopian kingdom of God where wild animals and human (AND human-to-human) can live in harmony and at peace with one another. A little child shall lead and point the way. What a powerful vision as offered to us through the prophet Isaiah! Also, not sure if you can see it, but if you pay closer attention, you’ll also notice at the far left of the painting in the background, there was seemingly a group of Quakers, presumably led by William Penn, who was making peace with the Native Americans. To the early 19th century Quaker artist, PEACE was possible not only between human and wild animals, but also among humankinds as well, we can lay down our weapons and recognize one another as God’s creations, co-habiting with one another on this God given land filled with the illuminating light of God in the background.

 Such powerful imagery sure gives us a great sense of assurance in times like this and in the society we live in today, when PEACE and harmony seem so hard to come by. Each day, as we turn on the news, we see violence, bloodshed, riots and vandals, terrorist threats are happening all around us, both in our own country or countries afar. The world (or the society we live in today) needs PEACE and harmony in our hearts **more so than ever before**…and how fittingly we find ourselves through our scripture on this 2nd Sunday of Advent, that HOPE and PEACE are possible. A little child would lead us to the place where God has prepared and promised us.

 Through these tell-tale signs and imageries, the prophet Isaiah offered the people a sign of hope and life in the midst of hopeless and dire situations*.* ***“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*** New life IS possible, even to a lifeless and dying stump of a tree that had remained stubborn for years and resistant towards change or growth, or to allow others to lead the way. They’ve become the stumbling blocks for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

 Furthermore, the prophet Isaiah foretold us that the only way a state of peace and harmony can be achieved is when **the people must seek repentance and revival towards justice and righteousness with one another.**  One way to do that is by becoming self-aware of our own flaws and inadequacies, exercising our humility, acknowledging that we need to depend upon God more than we depend upon ourselves, in order to steer us back into the right direction in life. It’s like we come to a dead-end T-Intersection with the **WRONG WAY** sign steering in front of us. We must make a choice about our future. We need to make a U-Turn, a “broken” U-Turn to be more specific…”broken” because of our relationship with God.

 Through our passage today, the prophet Isaiah was sending a clear warning to those who refused to acknowledge their sinful past. Scripture reminds us that for all have sinned and have fallen short of God’s glory. God’s judgement and wrath was upon them. There was a sense of urgency as the window was closing in. But there was still time for them to make that “broken” U-turn and restore their broken relationship with God, through their honest confession and repentance. In the midst of judgements and wraths to come, HOPE and PEACE may still be possible.

 The same urgent warning message was echoed in another familiar text from the New Testament that we read earlier. John the Baptist foretold us another series of God’s warning signs for the future. John’s sign to the people was a message of repentance - an act of complete turn-around. The Greek word for repentance implies a complete turnaround of one’s attitude and one’s mind. No one! I mean, No one except Christ, is perfect and no one is exempt from the judgement and the wrath of God either. We need God’s grace and mercy to be reconciled with God. So that’s the bad news and the good news.

But there is a problem, many do not think that we need to confess our flaws and wrongdoings before God. We think pridefully of ourselves with our own accomplishment and we’ve taken God’s mercy for granted. We’ve placed ourselves at the center of the universe instead of God. We think that we can lead by telling others what they must do and how they do it, only to be humbled by God’s sending of a little child amongst us, restoring peace and reconciling humanity with God once again. THIS is the essence of what the season of Advent all about. This story does not get old and deserve to be retold year after year after year.

 John’s sign of repentance served both as a warning for us, as well as a challenge for us to reverse our course. It might sound quite harsh or exclusionary to the people back then and to us today, as John declared that “*the ax is lying at the root the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is to be cut down and thrown into the fire.”[[3]](#footnote-3)* But such harsh warning is necessary in order for us to “wake up” from our doldrum and to turn ourselves around before it’s too late.

Ironically these signs of peace and harmony that were prophesized by Isaiah were the same signs that the shepherds and the wise-men saw when they followed the bright shining star in the sky to the infant Christ-child laying in the manger in Bethlehem. This little Christ-child would once again lead us into a state of peace and harmony in the coming Kingdom of God.

 **Signs that are “obvious” in God’s eyes and ears, may not be “so obvious” in ours. Sometimes we purposely chose to ignore these God’s warning signs and continue our downward spiral path.** When God lays His ax upon the root of the trees that do not bear good fruits, the sign becomes obvious for all of us that we need to “WAKE UP” and to “STOP” what we are doing and make a “U-Turn” in our lives.

 We pray that ALL of God’s creations may live co-existently and in harmony with one another…and that includes our relationships with our environments, our eco-system, the air that we breathe, the land that we cultivate in the name of human progress or “economic development”, the wildlife that we often kill due to our personal ego or indirectly through the removal and destruction of their natural habitats. May we learn to honor and respect ALL of God’s living creations around us, creation that God has entrusted us with and to care for, not to exploit but to embrace.

 May this season of Advent be a sign of a “wake-up” call for all of us, who are patiently waiting and looking for Christ’s imminent return, while restoring God’s PEACE in this world, as well as in our hearts. In spite of our human attitudes of rebellion and resistance, true LOVE from Christ shall prevail at the end.

 We pray earnestly that through God’s grace, we would be able to identify and to lay aside those “not-so-obvious” signs that may draw us away from the true purpose and meaning of the season, with a little child leading the way. **Let us focus our eyes, our ears, and our hearts on these many signs of Advent - Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that we have in Christ**. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. *Isaiah 11:6-9* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 11:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 3:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)