

Isa. 11:1–10
Ps. 72:1–7, 18–19
Rom. 15:4–13
Matt. 3:1–12

Justice and Peace

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will regard God's promise of the peaceable reign and explore ways to live peaceably among all.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Isaiah 11:1–10

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Bruce C. Birch

The vision of harmony in verses 6–10 is often referred to as the vision of “the peaceable kingdom.” The image is of a return to Eden when God’s reign is finally consummated. When the anointed one described in earlier verses ushers it in, broken creation becomes the completely harmonious creation God intended. The earth will now be filled with the “knowledge of the LORD” (v. 9). This Hebrew term for knowledge is more than cognitive information; it is the full entering into and experiencing of what is known. So the earth will be infused with the reality of God, and it shall be as comprehensive as the waters of the sea (v. 9).

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Noel Leo Erskine

The church is not the kingdom of God, but its relationship to the kingdom signals its mission. The realm of God shines through the witness and mission of the church as the poor have good news preached to them and are judged with righteousness and equity. The Messiah awaits the church in a future of righteousness marked off by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of God, beckoning the church to a new future not of its own making but one made possible by YHWH. The challenge is not to be stuck in the traditions of the past but to be open to the new realm in which the proud will be punished, the humble will be exalted, and the practice of justice will be the order of a new day.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Stacey Simpson Duke

This is how hope gets its start—it emerges as a tiny tendril in an unexpected place. Where are the stumps in our own lives; where do we feel cut off? Can we imagine or believe that even now God might be nurturing the growth of something new and good from our old, dead dreams? Consider what areas of our lives most need the promise of new life, and how we might become open to such newness. Isaiah’s promise is not just a future one; even now there are tiny signs of hope and life in places that look dead and discarded.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Paul Simpson Duke

What of the “little child” who leads them? Shall Christians think of Jesus again? We should not make this move too quickly. Like the calf, lamb, kid, and ox, the child stands for the vulnerable, and is joined by others even younger and more vulnerable, happily playing in a safe world at last. Why is it the child who leads the whole bleating, mooing, yipping, snuffling, roaring, giggling company? The new creation wants a human presence—new, bright, undefended, and free—to love and care for it all.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 11:1–10

Focus on Your Teaching

Today's young people are growing up in some of the most polarized circumstances the world has ever known. Middle-ground or compromise positions are almost unheard of. When people or groups disagree, they often attempt to destroy one another. The media and special interest groups try to convince us that there are definite right and wrong positions on every issue. No one is immune to the divisions that exist between people. Young people who have experienced conflict firsthand, including in the church, will need special reassurance that in God's reign lions and lambs can peacefully coexist.

God, calm my anxious heart so that I might witness to the peace you bring. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- self-adhesive name tags
- Advent wreath
- matches or lighter
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils
- newsprint
- markers
- sponges
- cups
- buckets of water
- taper candles

For Responding

- option 1: newsprint, markers, copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Edward Hicks' painting *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Internet-connected device optional), art paper, watercolors, brushes
- option 3: artificial Christmas tree, poster board, markers

For Film Connection

- Bibles, Internet-connected device

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, write the following on separate name tags, enough for each person to have one: wolf, lamb, leopard, goat, cow, bear, lion, ox, and snake. If you will be using option 2 in Responding, locate a print of one of Edward Hicks' many paintings called *The Peaceable Kingdom* in your public library or use a Google Images search, keywords "peaceable kingdom painting."

Greet the young people as they arrive. Distribute name tags you have prepared. Invite the young people to behave as the animal on their name tags would behave. Select two or three participants and ask them to move the animals from one part of your learning area to another. See what creative options your animal caretakers can design to move the animals. As they work, invite them to name the frustrations they face. Discuss:

- ❖ Why is it so hard to get different groups to work together?
- ❖ How would the situation be different if the groups involved were human beings instead of animals?

Explain that, in today's Scripture passage, Isaiah paints a picture of God's coming peace that offers hope for Christ's followers during the season of Advent.

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Have a participant light two of the candles and pray:

God of love, thank you for your presence among us as we continue our Advent journey together and as we seek to connect with your holy Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Isaiah 11:1–9) and pencils. Ask volunteers to read the text slowly and to refer to background information in the text boxes. Encourage the group

This study does not include verse 10; even though the lectionary includes verse 10 in this reading, most scholars say that Isaiah 11:10–16 comes from a much later time.

Help younger youth mature in their reading of the Bible by pointing out that there are different kinds of writings in the Bible.

to listen for words and phrases that indicate the new beginning Isaiah envisioned. Have the participants circle the words and phrases as they are read.

Ask the participants if they think the passage should be read literally or figuratively. If literally, encourage the group to wonder how the ascension of a human ruler would affect peace among natural enemies. If figurative, invite the group to brainstorm what Isaiah's words might refer to.

Write the phrase *fear of God* on newsprint. Talk about what the phrase means (awe, reverence). Invite the learners to list as many words to replace *fear* in the phrase without changing the meaning. Ask:

- ❖ Which word best expresses what you think Isaiah meant?
- ❖ What is the difference between that word and *fear*?
- ❖ What other relationships help us to understand something about fear of the Lord?
- ❖ Why do you think having fear of the Lord would lead to peace and justice?
- ❖ What do you think is the connection between fear of the Lord and the world being filled with the knowledge of the Lord?

Work in teams of three or four. Give each a bucket of water and a sponge. Place an empty cup for each group at the opposite end of the area. On your “Start,” have each group’s members take turns carrying wet sponges and filling the cups with water. Give every group time to fill their cup. This is not a contest, but a way to experience fullness. When the cups are full, ask:

- ❖ What does Isaiah mean when he says that when God’s purpose is fulfilled, the world will be full of the knowledge of God?
- ❖ How do people become filled with the knowledge of God?
- ❖ From where does the knowledge of God come?
- ❖ How does being full of the knowledge of God change people?

Form different groups of three or four. Instruct the groups to work together to identify someone (a real person they know) or some group (again, people they know, not media or historical personalities) whom they consider a good role model for growing in faith. Have them decide what it is about the ones chosen that makes them “full of the knowledge of God.” Ask them to discuss what makes them want to pattern their lives after these people.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **What Is Just** The participants will explore ways to live peaceably among all by brainstorming the concept of justice and evaluating scenarios. Invite the youth to name key words and phrases that describe justice and record them on newsprint. If not mentioned, add that biblical justice includes restoration and reconciliation. Review the words and phrases, and combine ideas to create a definition of justice the whole group agrees on. With that understanding of justice, apply it to the scenarios on Resource Sheet 2 (Scenarios about Justice). Read each situation and its options. Ask the youth to move to places in the room designated for option 1 and option 2. Those who are not

**EASY
PREP**

sure can position themselves somewhere in the middle. Stop to discuss reactions after each situation. Ask how their choices fit their definition of justice. Encourage the group to name ways they can apply the definition of justice to their everyday decisions and the potential risks in doing so. Reflect on ways that living justly would lead to peace for all.

2. **Draw Peace** Participants will explore ways to live peaceably among all by studying a painting and creating their own artistic representation of a peaceful world. Invite the learners to look closely at the detail of the painting. Ask:
 - ❖ Other than the animals, what do you see?
 - ❖ How do those elements relate to peace or the lack of it?
 - ❖ Instead of lions and lambs, what opposing groups and forces are at work in the world?

Invite the learners to create works of art showing their own hopes for peace in the world.

Ask the congregation
to provide only new
clothes, nothing used.

3. **Advent Mission Project** The participants will continue to plan and lead a clothing collection project for your congregation. Explore ways Isaiah's vision of peace might be fulfilled through serving people who need clothing. As a group, assemble and place the artificial Christmas tree in the approved location in your church building. Have participants create and place a sign on the tree that says "Clothing Tree" and explains where the collected items will be given. Have the participants sign up for times in which it would be helpful to have someone present as church members bring in donated clothes.

CLOSING

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Give each person a taper candle. Have each participant identify a group or individual involved in conflict in your community, your region, or in the world at large. Invite the group to respond to each named conflict with the sentence prayer *God, give us peace*. After each situation is named, have a participant light his or her taper candle from one of the lit candles.

God who made us all, we are not all the same, but in you, we find unity of faith and purpose. Help us to celebrate the diversity among us and to treasure the ways we come together in peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

■ E N H A N C E M E N T

FILM CONNECTION

Watch the clip from *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (bit.ly/AllDogsCharlie). Introduce the clip by explaining that Charlie, one of the dogs, is about to go to heaven. View the clip together and then explore the following questions:

- ❖ In the film clip, Charlie sees a lion lying down with lambs and hears that heaven is orderly and calm. Is this a good image of heaven? Why or why not?
- ❖ How does the clip relate to Isaiah 11:1–9?
- ❖ What does Isaiah 11:1–9 teach us about hope for God's future?

Isaiah 11:1–9

Jesse was King David's father; "stump" refers to the end of the line of David's successors. Many scholars believe that Isaiah was writing to express dissatisfaction with Ahaz, the current king, and to encourage the people to look forward to a more suitable ruler, a second David, whom God would send.

A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;
a branch will sprout from his roots.

The Lord's spirit will rest upon him,
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and **fear of the Lord.**

He will delight in fearing the Lord.
He won't **judge** by appearances,
nor decide by hearsay.

**He will judge the needy with righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who suffer in the
land.**

He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked.
Righteousness will be the belt around his hips,
and faithfulness the belt around his waist.

**The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed together,
and a little child will lead them.**

The cow and the bear will graze.

**Their young will lie down together,
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.**

**A nursing child will play over the snake's hole;
toddlers will reach right over the serpent's den.**

**They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy
mountain.**

The earth will surely be filled with the **knowledge of the
Lord,**
just as the water covers the sea.

"Shoot" represents new beginnings.

"Fear of the Lord" means "awe" and "reverence."

This monarch will judge according to God's justice.

God is predisposed to the plight of the needy. This ruler will carry out God's justice.

Harmony in nature will be a result of the ideal rule of the hoped-for king. Why are there so many references to young children and young animals?

The ideal king, God with us, will bring forth peace and justice.

Knowledge of God is personal, intimate, relational knowing. It brings peace and harmony to the world.

—Common English Bible

Scenarios about Justice

1

Mike has volunteered to take part in fund-raising for a class field trip. Part of the fund-raising involves selling baked goods each lunch hour. When others aren't looking, Mike takes \$50 from the cash box. The faculty sponsor later notices the missing money. She approaches the principal and they decide to confront Mike.

Option 1: The teacher and the principal confer and decide to ban Mike from the field trip. They also ask him to repay the money he stole.

Option 2: The teacher and the principal schedule a group conference to discuss Mike's actions, inviting a few students from the field trip fund-raising committee to attend. They want to find ways to express their disappointment and restore Mike's trustworthiness.

Which is more just?

2

You look at the tag on your school's basketball jersey that you bought from the school, and find out that it is made by a company known for its use of sweatshops. Upset that your school seems to be supporting a company that has unjust labor practices, you talk to your friends at school. They seem upset with you for making a big deal. What do you do next?

Option 1: You decide to stop supporting companies with bad labor policies, but do so quietly to preserve your friendships.

Option 2: You petition the student council and school board to limit financial dealings to companies that support fair labor practices.

Which is more just?

3

(for older youth) Your parent(s) was/were supposed to be gone all weekend, leaving you home alone. You invite a few friends over on Saturday night, and things begin to get out of hand. An older friend shows up with some beer. Just as you are deciding what to do, your parents pull up in the driveway.

Option 1: Your parents say they will never trust you again and call your Aunt Nadine to stay with you on their next trip.

Option 2: Your parents take everybody home and then sit down for an extended conversation with you about responsibility.

Which is more just?