

Isa. 11:1–10

Ps. 72:1–7, 18–19

Rom. 15:4–13

Matt. 3:1–12

Peace-Filled Kingdom

Goal for the Session Adults will express visions of the peaceable kingdom following Isaiah’s radical vision of peace.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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

Isa. 11:1–10

Focus on Your Teaching

The Bible’s vision of peace may seem unrealistic to some in your group. Conflicts in families, churches, communities, and the world may have made them skeptical that peace can or should be pursued. Others may be so familiar with biblical messages of peace that they are not stirred anymore, and it doesn’t seem any more likely to happen than an old stump sprouting again. This session and this season are about helping adults read the familiar text with new eyes and ears, looking and listening with our hearts rather than just our eyes or ears.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, that I may see and embrace your vision of peace. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth or placemat
- Advent wreath with candles or 4 votive candles
- lighter or matches
- Bibles
- newsprint or board
- marker
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- paper, pens
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for December 11, 2022

For Responding

- option 2: materials listed at activity
- option 3: newsprint or board, marker

✠ Isaiah 1:4
✠ Isaiah 1:21–23
✠ Isaiah 2:7–8
✠ Isaiah 3:12b–15
✠ Isaiah 5:20–23
✠ Isaiah 24:4–6

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a blue or purple cloth or placemat in the center of your space, using the same color your church uses in worship during Advent, and put the Advent wreath or votive candles on it. The words for the closing song are provided on Resource Sheet 2 (“Lo, How a Rose”); however, the words with music are found in most church hymnals and many YouTube clips are available online which may be downloaded and shown to accompany the group.

Welcome the group to the Second Sunday of Advent. Dim the lights, if possible. Light two candles. Invite participants to take a few deep breaths and release any worries they have brought with them today, and then to gaze at the candlelight and quietly reflect on God’s gift of peace, given through Christ Jesus. Conclude this time by praying aloud:

Come to us today, Lord Jesus. Amen.

If it is not safe to leave the candles lighted, extinguish them and light them again for Closing. Turn up the lights.

Form pairs or groups of three. Have each group pick one of the following world events that many people at the time never expected to occur and discuss what all had to happen for it to take place: desegregation in the southern United States (1960s); the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989); the end of apartheid in South Africa (1990). After a few minutes, discuss responses. Ask:
✠ What small signs of hope were evident even before the events took place?

EXPLORING

Set the context for today’s lesson by explaining that in earlier chapters, Isaiah gave a gloom-and-doom report of wars, corruption, and social injustice that filled the land. Have adults work in pairs to look up the verses in the sidebar from Isaiah and describe the condition of the nation and society to which Isaiah is speaking.

Today's focus scripture from Isaiah is addressed to the people and leaders of Judah, the southern portion of the now divided kingdom. Judah was once a tribe of Israel; Jesse's son King David came from Bethlehem in Judah.

After sufficient time, invite pairs to call out descriptions of the society. Note them on newsprint or board. Discuss the connections Isaiah makes between social justice and peace.

Ask:

- ✿ How would the prophet's words have given hope to people to continue looking even when nothing seemed to change?

Explain that the first part of the focus text describes the type of leader who was to come. Have adults read Isaiah 11:1–5 silently and select the phrase from these verses that he or she finds most hopeful and promising. Invite each person to read the phrase selected. Ask:

- ✿ What does it mean that the new leader will judge by righteousness rather than by what his eyes see or what his ears hear?
- ✿ Who in Judah would have been most encouraged by these words?
- ✿ Who would have been most threatened?

Return to the pairs and pretend you are living back then and this is very good, hopeful news. You are working on a campaign for the new leader. What one phrase would you use in a campaign poster or bumper sticker? Have the pairs report.

Explain that the second part of the focus text describes the new type of world this leader will lead. Read Isaiah 11:6–10.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Isaiah 11:1–10). Have a volunteer read the “What?” excerpt. Allow a few moments for participants to discuss their reactions to the idea that the prophet expects a leader to come first, followed by a radical return to Eden where all animals are at peace with one another. Ask:

- ✿ How might people living under poor conditions react to the idea that predator animals and their prey could live together?

Note that this idea might have been a challenge for oppressed members of society who only wanted revenge on their human predators.

Read the last sentence of the “Where?” excerpt. Ask:

- ✿ How might being stuck in the traditions of the past close people's recognition of this new realm described by Isaiah?

In preparation for Responding, ask a volunteer to read the “So What?” and “Now What?” excerpts on Resource Sheet 1. Invite the group to think about signs of shoots in their lives, your church community, or local or world events.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Personal Reflection** Participants will express visions of the peaceable kingdom by imagining where peace is happening in the world. Invite the participants to reflect on the implications of Isaiah 11 for the world today. Have them think of some conflict or

EASY
PREP

issue that seems hopeless. It may be a family fight or conflict with a church member, or it may be an event on the world stage. Invite the participants to envision peace as a shoot popping up in the midst of conflict. Ask them to think of actions they might take that promote Isaiah's vision. Have them choose one action and commit to taking it the following week.

The peace tree activity may be done individually on paper or as a group on newsprint. A more elaborate version might include a three-dimensional tree with ornaments to display in the church's worship space or other visible area.

- 2. Peace Tree** Participants will express visions of the peaceable kingdom by drawing a peace tree. Throughout the history of God's people, there are examples of renewal and rebirth, when what seemed dead and lifeless was given new life and new hope. Make available art supplies to create a peace tree for display. Encourage the group members to draw the outline of a tree and include ornaments that remind them of the promise of Isaiah 11. When complete, hang the "tree" somewhere in the church for all to see.
- 3. Successors to Isaiah** Participants will express visions of the peaceable kingdom by recalling pleas for peace today. Invite participants to name modern prophets who have called people, communities, and nations to peace (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, John Lennon, Dorothy Day, Cindy Sheehan, and so forth). Write the names on newsprint or board. Ask:
 - ✪ What visions of peace did these peacemakers provide? How did they communicate their visions?
 - ✪ How did people respond to their calls for peace?
 - ✪ How are you involved in reflecting God's vision for peace in the world?
 - ✪ What more might God be calling you to do?

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath or votive candles. Invite participants to offer a word or phrase that summarizes how they understand Isaiah's prophecy of peace.

Next, ask them to reflect quietly on what difference this will make for their lives in the coming week. Invite participants to take a few minutes to write these reflections on a piece of paper and then keep the paper in a place (perhaps with their Bibles) where they can return to it throughout the week for further reflection and prayer.

Gather around the Advent candles. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 ("Lo, How a Rose"). Sing or read the hymn from the resource sheet, and then conclude with this prayer or one of your choosing:

We pray for your Spirit to rest upon us and all leaders in the world, to give wisdom and understanding, that we may seek peace and justice in our land and in all the earth. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for December 11, 2022, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage class members to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session.

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.

“Lo, How a Rose”

“Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming”

Music: Es Ist Ein Ros’
German carol, 15th century
Translated: Theodore Bake

Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming from tender
stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse’s lineage coming, as men of old
have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah ’twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God’s love aright, she bore to men a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

