

Choose a Better Way

This week's texts challenge both our inner and outer lives. Isaiah offers a vision of creation being ordered differently, and kings ruling with justice and peace. The psalmist also offers a vision of peace and justice, and a people choosing to be intentional about following God's call to care for people on the margins. The apostle Paul invites people to choose to live in peace and to welcome one another as followers of Christ, and the gospel writer urges people to turn from their old ways and to align themselves more closely with God's desires.

Focus scripture: Isaiah 11:1–10

Isaiah 11:1–10 offers a vision of the peaceable kin-dom, where the instincts of predators and prey are reversed, and part of who they are has fundamentally changed.

The vision is a symbolic one that offers possibilities of how lands might be governed with peace and justice. At the time of writing, it would have been common for leaders to come across animals such as lions and other predators. Kings were also portrayed as ones who would fight and kill those lions; such actions were considered to show that the king was fit for governance. It was not common for a king to be described as peacefully abiding among lions. In this context, Isaiah's vision of having lions and lambs together is about leaders fundamentally doing things differently and living in peace among peoples.

This section of the book of Isaiah was written during a time of war and destruction in Assyria; peace would not have been heard as an abstract concept. The image of a shoot emerging from a remnant is a symbol of promise and hope. The next ruler, after Ahaz, will be faithful to the way of God, and a descendant of David (Jesse was the father of King David).

A final more modern reference can be made between this text and the vision for intercultural and racially just communities. The text refers to the lion intentionally giving up its power, making space for the more vulnerable and marginalized in shared community.

The path to the peaceable kin-dom recognizes the profound truth that we all are predators and we are all prey; we carry the capacity for both. We all carry precarious powers and potential for peace. Attending to our inner warfare – the power-hungry lions within us that tear into our insecure inner lambs – is the hardest work of all. However, in this way, we join

God in imagining our worlds, inner and outer, present and future in hopeful reconciliation.

The vision pictures a different kind of community where power dynamics have shifted, where space is intentionally made for one another, where leaders come from unexpected places, and where there is beauty, peace, justice, and equity in what God has created.

Possibly written for a king's coronation, the writer of **Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19** prays that the new king will reign with justice, and for justice and care for people who have been impoverished and oppressed. The prayer concludes with an exhortation that God's glory will fill the Earth.

In **Romans 15:4–13** Paul also prays that God is glorified in and through a people living in the way of Jesus. Paul hopes that people will choose to live together in peace, and not with conflict. Those who are strong will help those who are weak, and together they will build up Christian community. Paul urges the church to welcome one another.

In **Matthew 3:1–12** John the baptizer has already chosen a different way. He roams in the wilderness, away from places of power and privilege, wearing camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey. Urging people to choose a better way, he asks them to repent from their old ways, and to choose a different direction or course; to become more closely aligned with God's desire and God's work for peace and equity for all peoples.

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This week's readings invite us to make changes in our lives, to better build up the community, and to draw closer to God. What changes might you want to make in your own life to be closer to God?



Focus scripture Isaiah 11:1–10

Additional scriptures
Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19
Romans 15:4–13
Matthew 3:1–12

**Open us, O God,
to your unfolding
vision of peace.
Shape us for
shalom by the
power of your
Spirit.
Make us bold to
hope and dream,
living as your trust-
ing children.
In the name of
Christ. Amen.**

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

