

**Strange Bed Fellows
First Christian Church
July 3, 2011**

**Rev. Charlene Wozny
Omaha, Nebraska
Third Sunday after Pentecost**

Scripture Text: Isaiah 11:1-9

Given the title of this sermon and all the news coverage in recent months about “bedbugs” one might assume that I will be talking about those creepy, blood-sucking little critters. But, before you get totally grossed out or totally excited, let me either put your mind at rest—or rain disappointment down upon you. I will not be addressing the issue, or subject of bedbugs.

The scripture passage from Isaiah gives no real hint of discord, in fact, just the opposite. We are given a picture of completed wholeness. The visual picture that the prophet paints is often referred to as “The Peaceable Kingdom.” In reality, the picture that the prophet paints is more than just peace—or an absence of war—it is an all encompassing wholeness that is captured in the Hebrew word Shalom. That word, though often translated as “peace” in English is actually more about wholeness—completes wellness.

This passage which is often referred to as “The Peaceable Kingdom” comes from the title of a painting by Edward Hicks, an early 19th-century primitive painter. Hicks based his work on today’s passage. Hick’s version, like the one depicted in Isaiah is a world filled with peace, tranquility and love. If you notice, even the animals who would ordinarily be reacting to the instincts encoded in their biosystems, like the lion, wolf, leopard, calf and kid are all sharing the same grazing land and are lying down to rest with each other.

Contrast this idyllic vision with the type of harmony and serenity found in a pet cemetery. There, the alligators, cats, dogs, pigs, hamsters, turtles, chicken and rabbits can peacefully share the same small space. Which of these visions do you think comes the closest to describing a plausible situation where hunter and prey can peacefully live together? Think about it—a wolf and a lamb living and resting together in peace—maybe, if they are both dead.

Does God really mean what the prophet depicts in vs. 6-9 about animals living peaceably together or does He mean something else? If we take these verses literally, according to the normal way in which words are

understood, then we are forced to conclude that the kingdom has not yet arrived! If you go to any zoo, you will not find any lions eating straw. Today no loving mother would allow her child to play with a deadly poisonous snake.

There is a story told of a Russian zookeeper who made this boast, “In our zoo here in Moscow, the wolf dwells with the lamb in the same cage, something which you Americans do not have.” But he failed to mention that a new lamb had to be put in the cage every day!

Frederick Buechner in *Listening to Your Life*, a book of daily reflections focused on “peace” on September 8 (p 239) reflects: “Peace has come to mean the time when there aren’t any wars or even when there aren’t any major wars. Beggars can’t be choosers; most of us would settle for that. But in Hebrew peace, *shalom*, means fullness, means having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself.”

India’s Gandhi was a freedom fighter in his own right—and yet—he never picked up a weapon. On March 12, 1930 Gandhi and 78 of his loyal followers set out on a 240 mile trek to Dande Beach on the western coast of

India to protest the British tax on salt which was the only condiment of India's poor. The "Salt March" invigorated India's Hindu population but not its Islamic population which was a blow to Gandhi's vision of unity—but the march began India's road to independence and its end as a British Colony.

Other peaceful resisters could be found in the French village of Le Chambon sur Ligny. A local pastor, Andre Trocme led a resistance movement of citizens who refused to cooperate with the Vichy government and saved thousands of children and adults under the very noses of the Gestapo who was attempting to round up all the Jewish people and ship them off to concentration camps. A story is told in sociologist Phillip Hallie's book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* when Trocme was detained for questioning during a roundup in a Paris train station. His twelve-year-old son was waiting for him outside—he was very nervous because his father had taken a strange vow not to lie even if his life depended on it for as long as the war would last.

When his son realized that his father wasn't coming and went back in to find him, he caught the eye of his father peering out of the railroad car in

which he was a prisoner. At the sight, his face registered profound shock—a shock that was echoed in the heart of the German soldier guarding the car who happened to look at the boy just then. The effect was so powerful that the soldier, against orders, released Trocme. The father and son walked quietly out of the station to continue the great work that had begun.

Both Gandhi and Trocme chose loving, peaceful means of resistance instead of fighting violence with violence. Evangelist Billy Graham is quoted as saying: “Peace often must begin with ourselves: ‘Love is not a vague feeling or an abstract idea. When I love someone, I seek what is best for them. If I begin to take the love of Christ seriously, then I will work toward what is best for my neighbor. I will seek to bind up the wounds and bring about healing, no matter what the cost may be.’” Gandhi (a Hindu) and Trocme (a Christian) both exemplify the love of Christ as defined by Billy Graham. The love of Christ is the kind of love that empowers us to act in the best interest of others—sometimes even at great cost to ourselves. Those are the kinds of actions that bring about true shalom.

Gail Svirsky from *Peace Notes*, published in the Summer of 2001, had an article entitled “Women work to end the siege of Palestine” where she writes: “The Israeli army laid siege to many cities, towns and villages in the occupied territories, digging trenches across the roads making them impassable by cars. This serves no security function—it prevents Palestinians from having access to each other, not to Israel. For some time, the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace has been demonstrating to lift this siege. Today we worked hand in hand with three other organizations: Rabbis for Human Rights, Gush Shalom, and the Committee Against House Demolitions. We planned to go to a village under siege and physically fill in the trench, thereby making the road passable....At the perimeter of the village; we marched with our shovels and hoes toward the trench, blocked by a line of soldiers. However, they didn’t open fire, and we easily passed through and swarmed all over the trench, trying to fill it up. Half the group broke away to work on filling up a second trench. Then the soldiers confiscated every single tool we brought, and arrested four of us. In response, we just all got down and with our hands began to scratch out handfuls of dirt and rocks, and throw them into the trenches. Some of the children from [the village] came out and joined us, and we worked together in the hot sun for over two hours. And when it was over,

everyone was amazed to see that we had filled in both trenches, and made the road passable.”

As I read this story, I was amazed once again at what can be accomplished by a group of individuals, peacefully going about making a difference—even in the face of violence.

Finding peace—shalom does not mean agree. Brian Muldoon in *The Heart of Conflict* (New York; G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1996), 212 asserts: “One of the great achievements in human thought is the recognition that people can ‘agree to disagree.’ We both remain convinced that we are right—perhaps, even more so than before—but the encounter took away the edge from disagreement. I can still have my position without savaging your right to yours. At the Parliament of the World’s Religions, I asked the venerable Thai Buddhist monk Ajan Phra Maha Surasak Jivanando how the difference among religions, which seemingly had caused so much bloodshed, might be reconciled. ‘Simple,’ he replied through an interpreter. ‘Each religion must follow its own precepts, be true to itself. Then there will be peace. War comes not from following religion but by disobeying it.’”

Frederick Buechner, referred to earlier, concludes his entry on peace in the following way. “One of the titles by which Jesus is known is Prince of Peace, and he used the word himself in what seems at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. On one occasion he said to the disciples, ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword’ (Matthew 10:34). And later on, the last time they ate together, he said to them, ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you’ (John 14:27). The contradiction is resolved when you realize that for Jesus peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle, but the presence of love.”

Mahatma Gandhi who once said: "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ." Gandhi adopted a totally non violent stance in life and lived a life that exemplifies many of the teachings of Jesus—a life that, if lived out by more of us, I think could do much to usher in true shalom in our world.

Gandhi’s developed 5 teachings to bring about world peace. They are teaching that can fit any belief system and, if practiced by more of us, who knows what would happen in our world.

Teaching # 1: Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.

Teaching # 2: What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?

Teaching # 3: There are many causes that I am prepared to die for but no cause that I am prepared to kill for.

Teaching # 4: An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.

Teaching # 5: We must become the change we want to see in the world.

This last teaching echoes Jesus reminding his disciples to live as if the Kingdom of God was already here. Jesus taught his disciples to live lives that reflect the Kingdom of God—to do that would bring about true shalom.