

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
Isaiah 11:1-10

December 9, 2007
Rev. Robin Long

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD -

3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

5 Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

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

7 The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

9 They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner
for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his
place of rest will be glorious.

She's watched the *Biggest Loser* every Tuesday night since the season premiere and is eagerly anticipating the big finale show in a couple of weeks. She hasn't missed an episode of the reality program featuring real-life folks who take up residence at a weight-loss center in California where their every meal is monitored and they work with fitness trainers for hours a day. Her favorite part of the program is the weigh-in—the participants get on the scale in front of a TV audience of millions to discover who lost the most and who lost the least and who will be going home. She is inspired as she watches people's bodies transform as they lose 20, 30, 60, and some even over 100 pounds. But she is so frustrated because this is her third season of watching *The Biggest Loser* and even though she tunes in and watches each and every week, she still hasn't lost a pound. Not a single pound.

This is not unlike the guy who rode my bumper all the way from Suttons Bay down M-22 to Traverse City until Tom's West Bay. Then, when the lane divides into two, he whizzed by me on my left side and as he zoomed past me I saw the "Give Peace a Chance" bumper sticker on his car. Pray tell, what's peaceful about driving like a maniac and tail gaiting someone for 11 miles just so you can whiz by them at Tom's West Bay only to find yourself lined up in traffic right beside them, less than a mile farther down the road, at the light at 22 and Division?

If you want to lose weight, you can't just watch a show. If you want peace, you can't just stick a bumper sticker on your car. And besides, what kind of peace was he thinking about when he stuck that "Give Peace a Chance" on his car? Did he put it there as a political statement, referring to the kind of peace that has ironically, thanks to political spin doctors, become a divisive issue in American society? Is he talking about the kind of peace that has come to be understood falsely as something that a liberal wants and a conservative doesn't? Because if that's the kind of peace he wants to give a chance, I'd have to say that that kind of peace hasn't got a chance. That's a peace based on a false dichotomy and misperceptions of those on the right and the left. That's a peace based on the foolish belief that human beings have the ability to achieve absolute peace in the first place. That's a peace that brings not peace, but further division and misunderstanding. That's a peace that implies the absence of war, but doesn't

motivate the guy calling for such peace to slow down and calm down so as not to be endangering his life and the lives of others with his aggressive and extremely non-peaceful driving habits.

Alas, there is the peace of the bumper sticker and political rally proportions and then there is the peace of the Biblical proportions.

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

7 The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

The peace of Biblical proportions is a peace that turns the world as we know it upside down. It's so much more than a Palestinian and an Israeli sitting down for peace talks at Camp David. It's so much more that George Bush and Hillary Clinton becoming chums. It's a wild wolf who should be stalking a lamb in the hopes of biting into that fleshy, yummy place in its neck and enjoying a fine meal, it's that same wolf getting into the lamb pen and, instead of attacking, snuggling down with the lamb for a bit of a nap. It's a cobra who, even when facing the would-be threat of a little child disturbing his nest, it's a cobra who doesn't strike, a cobra who keeps his fangs to himself. The peace of Biblical proportions is a peace that ushers in a whole new way of living and being and understanding the world. It's a peace that, though foretold by the prophet Isaiah, began to be realized in the work, word, and ways of Jesus Christ—the child who came to lead us all.

Such a peace begins not by putting a sticker on one's bumper, but rather, right here, in a house of God. It begins in a space where we gain an understanding of our place in the world as we begin to understand our own relationship to this Christ Child. It is that peace that passes understanding—a peace that only comes to us through the grace of XXXXXGod. As Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you my friends, not as the world gives . . .

Angelo Roncalli, who became known as Pope John the 23rd in the late 1950s and early 60s, is considered by many to be the greatest pope of the last century. Dedicated to creating fruitful ecumenical relationships with non-Catholics and a staunch supporter of the reforms of Vatican II, he is famous for, in the words of commentators of the day, "Opening the doors and windows of the church." He was gregarious, warm and personable. However, he was also the leader of the Catholic Church during a time of great stress and upheaval—both in the church and the wider society—which took a particular toll on him. When asked how he dealt with the stress and pressures of his calling he responded, "When I go to bed at night with the weight of the Church and a billion Catholics on my mind I ask myself, "Who runs the church, You or Christ? XX(breath)XX Go to sleep, Angelo."

And thus is the joy of knowing the peace of Christ in the recognition of one's place in the cosmic order of things. Pope John the 23rd knew his place in relation to God—namely, that he was not God and therefore did not need to take the burdens of the world upon himself. He could still work for God but he need not do the work of God. There in lies the peace—the peace that passes understanding. It's the peace that comes from knowing that although you love your kids, you don't run their lives and even though you raised them as best you could, there will be times when their decisions aren't your decisions but when you come right down to it and you think you're facing another sleepless night worrying about them you ask yourself, "Who runs their lives, You or Christ?" and you will be able to say to yourself, XX(breath)XX "Go to sleep." It's the peace that comes from knowing that, even though you

work hard to get ahead there still never seems to be a lot of money but then, when you really think about it you realize that although there's not a lot there is enough and so instead of crunching numbers all night you say to yourself "Who runs my life, money or Christ?" and you will be able say to yourself, XX(breath)XX "Go to sleep." It's the peace that comes from knowing that even though the diagnosis doesn't look good and the statistics aren't on your side, you know there's more to life than this life and when you ask yourself "Who runs my life, this illness or Christ?" you will be able to say to yourself XX(breath)XX "Go to sleep." It is the peace that allows you to, in spite of what's going on at work or at school or in your family or in your marriage or with your friends or with the state of the world or with your health or with your home, it's the peace that allows you to as yourself "Who runs life? You or God?" and then be able to say to yourself XX(breath)XX "Go to sleep." It is the peace that passes understanding, a peace that makes the seemingly impossible common place, a peace that is available to you and to me not because we've put a bumper sticker on our car, but rather because God put a baby in a manger and Mary called him Jesus and he's come and is coming again and it will be then and only then that . . .

9 They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

XX(breath)XX Go to sleep, dear friends. The peace of Christ is with you, now and always. Amen.