

For the Journey

Dec. 4, 2025 - Rev. Dave Crawford



“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” - Isaiah 11:6 (from the O.T. reading for Advent 2; Dec. 7th - Isaiah 11:1-10)

Over the years I’ve collected quite a few books. I’ve read some of them, have read parts of others, and possess many more which remain as fresh and new as the day I purchased them five, ten or twenty years ago. I have optimistic plans for book reading in the years ahead.

One author I’ve not yet read is W. Somerset Maugham, although I have a couple of his books. I think I bought the books because I liked the name and was aware of his fame. Maugham’s The Painted Veil, and The Razor’s Edge rest comfortably on the bookshelf. Maugham once offered these words, I’m not sure where: “Imagination grows by exercise, and contrary to common belief, is more powerful in the mature than in the young.”

Advent requires imagination. Christmas requires it too. Not fantasy or fiction however, but imagination grounded in truth - the ability to consider a reality or realities other than what we often see and experience in life, in this world, a reality above and beyond this world, yet within it, permeating every element of our human condition. We call it faith, trust, belief, relationship, although words can't really capture the kind of imagination we're talking about.

The Bible is filled with metaphor, symbolism, poetry and hyperbole. In the United Church we profess a belief in the Word of God without claiming every sentence to be the words of God. Therefore when the prophet Isaiah speaks in chapter eleven of a seemingly impossible vision of peace for God's creation, we hear the poetry used with imagination, understanding Isaiah's not offering a literal Divine promise of idealized animal harmony coming to pass. Rather we're able to hear the greater truth of God's faithfulness through the prophetic poetry of Isaiah.

Let's back up a little. Israel has suffered political and societal decline when Isaiah speaks in chapter 11. Either the Assyrians in the 8th century BC, or the Babylonians in the 6th century (scholars are unsure) have defeated the Jewish kingdom. They're in exile, cut off from their homeland, cut off, they may assume, from God. Yet that's not the case. God is still faithful, still loving, merciful, still the creator of future possibility. Walter Brueggemann puts it this way: "The poet refers to God's life-giving, future-creating, world-forming, despair-ending power and wind (Spirit), which can create an utter newness. This wind of God (V. 2) is inscrutable, irresistible, beyond human control, management, or predictability. The poem announces that the Spirit has come to blow over any closed-off assumptions regarding apparent isolation; the wind indicates new possibility. The Spirit will prevail! The wind will win! God is faithful!"

Faith is often a struggle. The world doesn't take December off! Yet into that world, our world, God's world, and into our lives, comes the promise that while we may not know what the future holds, we know Who holds the future, and that makes all the difference. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them."

*Grace and Peace,
Rev. Dave*