



## IN DREAMS BEGIN RESPONSIBILITIES

December 8, 2019, The Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10

Douglas T. King, The Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York

---

You are lying in bed in some gloriously gentle liminal place between sleeping and waking. Your eyelids are still shut and there is some sense of the beginnings of daylight beyond them, but it has yet to completely rouse you from slumber. You are awash with a feeling of joy and completeness. Perhaps you cannot exactly recall the dream from which you are returning. But wherever you were, it is clear that all was right and well with the world, with yourself, and with everyone around you. As your consciousness begins to gain focus, you soon hear two of your children arguing over who is next in the bathroom. You begin to remember that conflict at work you are going to need to try referee that day. And you realize your back is achy from yesterday's workout. For a moment you fantasize about slipping back into dreamland. You long for that elusive completeness that has brushed up against your soul. But the realities of the day will not allow it. No time for dreams, back to the world at hand.

Well, Advent is a time for dreams. This morning's text from the prophet Isaiah is a vivid portrait of the dream the people of Israel have for their awaited messiah and the world that will be ushered in under their reign. It is an expression of the collective hunger of a people to find a home in that joy and completeness we visit in our unconscious.

The words we just heard read are familiar. In Christian ears they speak to the arrival of Jesus Christ in our midst. For many of us they bring up the visual of one of the renowned painter and Quaker minister, Edward Hicks', paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom. Each of the 62 paintings, one of which hangs in the Met, portrays an image of all of God's creatures living together in blissful harmony.



Just as visions of sugarplums dance in the heads of our littlest ones in this season of expectation, texts such as these allow us to dream of a world of justice and peace in which God has made all things right; where there is no war or discord to be found; where everyone has all they need and all divisions and dividing lines have faded away.

For the nation Israel at the time, life was characterized by uncertainty and fear. The rise of the Assyrian empire and weak internal leadership were bringing on a time of decline and the threat of chaos. When these words were first spoken, the nation was hungry for a word of hope. This hope was envisioned as a new king ascending from the legendary line of David, ushering in the reign of God with their deep and abiding faithfulness. For us, we live in our own time of uncertainty. We too hunger for a word of hope. And we envision that hope in Jesus Christ, full of “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

However we envision this text coming to life in our midst, wandering around in it for a few minutes can provide a warm and cozy feeling. It can be a lovely temporary escape from the many ways our world can be so harsh and divided these days, like a cup of hot cocoa and a warm blanket as a temporary respite from the winter chill. What a wonderful thought that someone is going to show up and fix all that is broken in this world. I am ready. I hope this all happens by Tuesday. What a compelling and comforting vision it is. I think I just might whip up some cocoa this afternoon, find that blanket, put on Handel’s *Messiah* and daydream about all of it for a while.

But, recently, there is this quote that keeps tugging at my warm blanket. It is by William Butler Yeats. “In dreams begin responsibilities.” In the season of Advent we are called to wait for the arrival of our Savior into our midst; to keep our eyes peeled for Jesus Christ’s presence once again infusing the world with the embodiment of the divine. But waiting and watching are not all we are called to do in this season. Advent is also a season of preparation. It is a time when we are called to make the world ready for Christ’s arrival. In these days we are given the



opportunity to not only dream about God's kingdom of peace and justice but to step into how we might participate in sowing the seeds to create it.

I have a friend who takes her dreams seriously. She has a book she uses to analyze what they mean. Every morning she ponders what her dreams have to teach her. The psychologist Carl Jung wrote extensively about the importance of dreams. He talked about how they assist in integrating our conscious and unconscious lives. He also wrote this about our visions, those daydreams we have. "Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes."

If the season of Advent is solely about waiting for God to come and make everything right with the world, it may be comforting but it will not be fully faithful and transformative. This is also a season when we need to look inside ourselves to see what our role might be in ushering in the reign of God; inviting peace and justice, into our world, into our country, into our city, into the places we work, and into our homes.

Our text this morning is a radiant portion of poetry. It is evocative as it paints a portrait of a leader and the world they will create. But leaders need followers to accomplish their goals. And while our God may not specifically need us, we are called to participate in what God is creating. Jesus Christ seeks disciples to go out into the world.

Our longings, our dreams for a better world, our hunger for a tangible sense of God's presence in our midst can shape us in two distinct ways. One of the ways we can be shaped by them is toward discouragement. We can look around at the vast imperfections around us and be frustrated that the reality we see is so distant from the visions we possess. The second way we can be shaped is toward hope; by allowing our longings to guide us forward to engage constructively with the world's imperfections. As Jung said, "to look inside ourselves and awake" to how we are being called to plant the seeds that Christ may use to grow the kingdom; to lay the foundation that Christ may build upon to fashion God's reign on earth. You are welcome to pick the metaphor you choose but our calling is clear.



Listen to what tugs on your heart and follow it. Do you dream of a world in which there is no more homelessness? Find your way to serving at our Jan Hus ministry. Do you have a vision where every new and struggling family in New York City has the tools to succeed? Pay a visit to Church of the Living Hope on 104<sup>th</sup> Street and discover how you can serve in East Harlem. Do you dream of Brick Church being a place where every member in crisis is exceedingly well cared for by this congregation? Offer your services to the Tender Loving Care committee of the Women's Association or the Lay Pastoral Care Group.

These are the words of the French writer [Antoine de Saint-Exupery](#), "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." But we do not need to be taught to long for the Peaceable Kingdom. Each of us has an innate hunger for God's reign in our midst. We have it laid out in the text before us in this text and we carry it in our hearts. We dream about it and daydream about it, each in our own fashion. We long for it.

Now we need to own these longed for dreams. Now we need to start crafting a boat to get us there. We need to pave the way for God's arrival. Yes, advent is a time of waiting and watching for the arrival of our savior. But it is also a time of preparing the way for the one who will lead us.

Hear these words yet again and ask yourself what part you are being called to play in setting this dream, this vision, this collective longing into motion.

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;



but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.  
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.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.”

Advent is a time for dreaming. And in dreams begin responsibilities.

*Thanks be to God. Amen.*