

A Daydream

December is always a busy time in the life of a church. There is so much to do, so many things to organize – special songs for the choir, play rehearsals for the Sunday school children, not to mention all the personal tasks that need to be performed to insure a good Christmas for our loved ones. There is always so much to do, and we are pushed to the limits of our energy and willpower. But... we are in the Advent season, and Advent means ‘immediate arrival’! During Advent, we are encouraged to hope for the immediate coming of God to us, into our lives, into our situations, into our locations, into our world.

However, the Advent hope we are encouraged to have is not the hope which is preconditioned by who we are now, by how we live now, by our life situations or by how our world runs now. Rather, the Advent hope is like daydreaming. Not all daydreams are equal – most are about small things and happy memories, but all of us sometimes have a daydream that we know can never come true, but we still dream it. Have you ever experienced that – a daydream that is so big, so wonderful, so perfect, and so impossible? It’s the daydream that you know will never come true – but you can’t help dreaming it.

Today’s reading from Isaiah is a prophetic declaration that the Kingdom of Peace certainly shall come, but it is also a perfect picture of the ultimate daydream.. It is a daydream, because the scene drawn by Isaiah is a picture that can never be realized. He dreams of a time and place where the wolf lives with the lamb and the leopard lies down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the yearling graze together, led by a little child. And he continues dreaming that the cow and the bear make friends with each other, their young lie down together, and the lion eats straw like an ox. And he even says in this peaceful realm, the infant shall play over the hole of the cobra’s den, and the young child shall put its hand on the viper’s nest. It’s fun to dream, but this dream is doubtful, unbelievable, and absolutely incredible! It’s not just dubious – it’s sheer impossibility.

In the days when the prophet Isaiah lived, Judea endured threats of death and destruction from every corner of the land: there were unceasing

invasions from the outer world, and they were in a state of continuous warfare. Strong neighbouring nations attacked Judea relentlessly, as it helplessly watched the northern kingdom of Israel be destroyed by Assyria. It was a period of division, suspicion, emergencies, warnings, invasions, wars, death and destruction. The people of Judea were like infants and toddlers living in a precarious place, surrounded by dangerous objects that could wound them at a touch.

In the midst of that time and place of extreme danger and fear, Isaiah dared to daydream of a peace which, wisdom holds, would never come true, not within his life time or within that of his descendents. The peace he imagined was not just the end of warfare – it was total peace, a peace that even the most vulnerable, infants and toddlers and young children enjoy. Imagine young children having freedom to play anywhere in complete safety. No dangerous objects and places at all. No concerned mothers saying “don’t go there.”. Not only human little ones, but animal little ones like lambs, calves, and lion cubs cannot stop jumping and hopping. The peace Isaiah dreamed of is joyful – a jumping and hopping peace – full of youthful freedom to play in safety.

We are in the advent season, the season of waiting for the immediate arrival of Jesus. What may we daydream to come? What may we hope for? What impossible possibility might we dare to yearn for? We may think our daydream looks tiny or insignificant, sounds naïve or nonsensical. There is no guarantee that our daydream will come true. But our daydreaming can be a good starting point for our participation in Advent, because we know that Advent has already started in the prophet Isaiah’s daydream, as a shoot of the stump of Jesse. Isaiah says “a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

Isaiah’s daydream gives us a glimpse of a peaceable kingdom that we might also daydream; peace comes not from the mighty power outside, but from a life within, like a shoot or a weaned child, that is frail yet precious; and peace comes not from separation but from being together, not from ignorance but from understanding, and not from assimilation but from mutual respect of differences and patience, like the wolf who mutes his fierce nature and the lamb who learns to trust.