

High St Uniting Church Frankston  
Isaiah 11: 1 - 10

The New Creation



Back in the 60's and 70's there was a huge change in the way we did Sunday School, moving from separate time and worship to the combined model that we follow now, and bringing in a whole new curriculum for our children and young people; I was happy that I didn't have to learn the catechism anymore or sit annual exams. With the new curriculum for the junior years came this strange little book,

*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Some of us had never heard of it and wondered what we were doing talking about witches in Sunday School! Of course, C.S. Lewis's telling of the lion Aslan, willingly sacrificing himself and being reborn, packaged the Christian story in a new way for younger minds. But the vision of the new kingdom from Isaiah this week brought to mind Lewis's world of Narnia in a different way; the kingdom of talking beasts all living together in peace looks a lot like "the wolf shall live with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid." Just as Aslan's death and rebirth was more than a children's story, so this picture of animals living together in Narnia is more than a nice idea for younger readers. The great hopeful vision of the new creation, devoid of violence and predation, devoid of power, and led by the joy and wonder of childhood.

Now, of course, Old Testament scholars will give you a very different interpretation of this passage from Isaiah. This is Isaiah driven by the wish for a new king in the line of David, one blessed by God with the spirit of wisdom and able to bring in a new kingdom like the glory days of David and Solomon. And the vision of animals living together is a metaphor for a peaceful kingdom with everyone following the Law of love of God and love of neighbour. But scripture is always more than what the writer was thinking when they picked up their pen and put words down on velum. This vision of a changed creation took on a whole new life in the Christian era when the early church saw Jesus as the branch growing out of the stump of Jesse, particularly with the story of his baptism by John taking up the image of the one on whom the Spirit will rest. And Paul took up the idea of a new creation with the wonderfully evocative words to the people at Rome, "The whole creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God."

Isaiah's vision becomes the hope of a new creation, set free from the bondage to death and decay. And I am sure that vision was a part of Lewis's inspiration for Narnia – a unified creation with animals and humans living in peaceable cooperation. And, of course, that line – "a little child shall lead them" – jumps out in this Advent season as we look towards the Christmas story. You may be wondering about the image on the screen, the hope of a world inside the wardrobe that drove that first story of Narnia can come alive in this season. Don't be surprised that there is a world inside the wardrobe, because, to quote from Narnia's seventh story, *The Last Battle*, "a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than the whole world."

Now, because scripture is alive and always more than the words, there is another interpretation of this passage that brings hope a little closer than the promised new creation. In the nineteenth century, the Quaker pastor and painter, Edward Hicks painted a

rather famous image, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, based on Isaiah's vision. But his painting contains more than the vision of animals coexisting. In the background he shows Quakers in peaceful negotiation with Native Americans. Hicks saw Isaiah's vision as a call to do something here and now to bring in peace. So, Hicks shifts our understanding of Isaiah's vision into the real world. The wolves of our economic system can be brought to live in peace with the consumer lambs. The leopards of war can be made to lie down with the victims of violence. And we begin to see that, as hopeful as the vision is, waiting for God to bring in the new creation is not enough, we are called to act for the kingdom of God here and now, in this world, and challenge the predators and the violent and the dangerous. The Advent stories of John, Elizabeth, Mary, and Simeon and Anna after Christmas, all carry hope, and hope is at the heart of our call to Social Justice, a hope born in the actions of God in Jesus Christ that we anticipate in Advent and driven by this vision of the kingdom of God and the promised new creation. This is a call to not hold the hope of God's blessing to ourselves, but share it, and bring it alive to those who are losing hope. In the foyer there is a display of all the initiatives being undertaken by the Justice and international Mission arm of our Synod. You would have seen them at the fete, and here's a chance to look again and see where the Spirit is calling you to act and bring hope alive in someone's life. Whether it's in one of the JIM initiatives, or something, or someone, close to you, take this Advent call to hope and make it live. Continue our walk up the mountain, also mentioned in today's text, by making the great themes of peace, hope, joy, and love more than wishes or spiritual ideas. The great theme of Christmas is Incarnation, so let's incarnate peace and hope in our world, recognising our unity in God's loving creation.