

“The Heart That Grew Three Sizes: The Peace That Cannot Be Stolen”

Isaiah 11:6-9

Narrator One: “Oh, goodness! How did we get to the second week of Advent and I still have so much to do? I don’t have all of my shopping done! The tree just got knocked down by the dog! The Christmas lights outside are not working properly! And the house still needs cleaning before my family arrives! I’m about to pull my hair out!”

Narrator Two: (softly) “Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel!”

Narrator One: (Looks around bewildered. Shrugs it off) Must be the wind. Now, back to my list! Let’s see...oh, why do I do this every year?! This is becoming too much, and I’m just about ready to cancel everything. In fact, I think that’s exactly what I’ll do. Christmas is cancelled this year! I’m not doing it! What’s the point anyway? Enough is enough!”

Narrator Two: (a little louder) “Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel!”

Narrator One: I know I heard something that time. (Looks around, then turns back towards congregation) Either there’s a lone caroler outside or maybe someone from the choir is rehearsing before the next service. Now as I was saying-

Narrator Two: (louder, close to Narrator One this time) “Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel! Shall Come to Thee O Israel!”

Narrator One: (in state of surprise/fear) Who are you? You weren’t here earlier!”

Narrator Two: “I know, but I am here now. Do not fear, Emily!”

Narrator One: “How do you know my name?”

Narrator Two: “I know, because God told me after hearing how you wanted to cancel Christmas. It won’t work.”

Narrator One: “Of course it will! I can decide what I will and will not do for one day. After all it is just one day. Why all this fuss? I just want some peace of mind. Is it too much to ask?”

Narrator Two: “You’re right, you can decide what to do on that day, and yes, it is one day. But, there is so much more to this day. More beyond the gifts, the lights, the cleaning. Perhaps, you would be willing to keep an open mind, and an open heart, to explore this with me? Change your mind about canceling Christmas?”

Narrator One: (looks to the congregation) “Should I?” (Focus on Narrator Two) “Oh, alright. I’ll come with you, but I’m not promising anything.”

Narrator Two: “That’s alright. I’m not asking you to. As I said, keep an open mind, and open heart, as we explore this day which is truly about **love**.”

**Song: Welcome Christmas**

This is the lesson which the Grinch learned about Christmas. He thought that Christmas was all about the presents, the festivities, and the decorations. What he didn’t

understand was the real meaning of Christmas, that it is all about love. He thought that by stealing the decorations and the presents, there would not be Christmas in Whoville. He thought that he would finally have peace and quiet on Christmas day. But to his surprise, Christmas came just the same.

Here is a clip of that part of the story: <https://dai.ly/x3ie7xt>

The theologian Matt Rawle writes, “Peace can be a tricky thing. It’s very easy to parody, easy to have something that looks like peace on the outside, but which is fundamentally a distortion of peace at its core. True peace is not a lack of conflict or the absence of war. That kind of peace was a means of control for Herod, the devil, and Caiaphas, and it was enforced by the threat of violence... The holy peace is a true **reconciliation** between God and humanity, and neighbor to neighbor. It is being at peace with one’s self even when all the toys have been put away and the decorations removed. That is the kind of peace that Jesus comes to bring... This kind of peace is something the Grinch cannot steal.”

Often times, our expectations of being peaceful are based on **control and security**. We think if we can just get the house cleaned, the shopping done, the schedule perfect, *then* we will have peace. Like Emily in our opening, we try to create peace by managing the chaos. Yet, the peace which Christmas brings is about a **different source**. It is about the peace that *passes all understanding*. It comes from our deep connection to life, God, and all beings—the recognition that **Emmanuel, God is with us**, regardless of our circumstances.

The prophet Isaiah envisioned this profound, God-given peace way back almost three thousand years ago. This vision became famously represented by the Quaker artist Edward Hicks, who painted his work *The Peaceable Kingdom* sixty-two times during his career: predators and prey lying down together in harmony, and a little rosy-cheeked child—the Christ child—leading them.



Let's listen to the promise of **Isaiah 11:6-9**:

**6** 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. **7** The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. **8** The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. **9** 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.

This is a highly unusual image! It's an image of profound reversal, where the natural order of **separation and predation** is replaced by a radical order of **unity and safety**. The key to Isaiah's vision is forming bonds among those who are usually separate. In this vision, we hear the prophet proclaiming a time when the people of Israel would have a righteous leader, a representation of God's will on earth, and the sign of that new reality will be the very moment the wolf and the lamb live together in peace.

At first blush, we may think that this is an impossible vision, a pipe dream, something that could never happen in our world today. The wolf *must* hunt the lamb to survive. The powerful *must* prey upon the weak.

Yet, as we consider this vision carefully, we see that Isaiah is not presenting a drug to help people cope. He is presenting a **divine reality** that calls us to change the way we see the world and God's involvement in it. Isaiah was a court prophet; he saw up close the political machinations, the manipulation of the powerful, and how fear was used to control and divide people.

But Isaiah was gifted with a deeper vision of reality. He did not only see the reality of the world as it *was*. He saw reality through the eyes of God, recognizing that God's presence permeated all of life, and that a caring community was possible.

- Where people saw only corruption and fear, **Isaiah was able to see God's presence.**
- Where people saw only conflict and divisions, **Isaiah saw the potential for wholeness and love.**
- Where people only saw despair and destruction, **Isaiah saw God's promise for hope and peace.**
- Where people only saw the law of the jungle, **Isaiah saw the potential for harmony and peace even in the wild.**

Isaiah saw a world where **cooperation** was the norm instead of **competition**, and he invited people to see life through that vision.

### **Our Invitation to Peace**

As we behold the Christmas story, we are invited to do the same thing. We are invited to expand our vision to see reality based on the divine energy that permeates all of life. We are invited to let go of the futile efforts to produce peace through **control and power**—the frantic lists, the perfect decorations, the avoidance of conflict—to embrace the peace that already exists through our **unity in Christ**.

The Christ child, whom the carolers call **Emmanuel**, is the little child leading the wolf and the lamb. He does not lead them through force, but through vulnerability, love, and a new wisdom. The Grinch couldn't steal this peace because it doesn't come from things; it comes from the presence of God among us.

This Advent, when the chaos and the lists threaten to overwhelm you, let the voice of Narrator Two break through: "**Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel!**"

We are called to begin living in Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom **today**, not just in some distant future. How?

- By offering grace instead of judgment.
- By choosing empathy instead of division.
- By remembering that the peace of God is not found in an empty house or a full bank account, but in the presence of the One who came as a helpless infant to reconcile all things.

We will take a few moments to meditate on Edward Hicks' *Peaceable Kingdom* painting and the peace it represents for us today. Look at the faces of the creatures, the protective posture of the child. Allow this image to remind you that the peace we seek is already within reach, waiting to be lived out in our world.

Amen.