

## The Peaceable Kingdom

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church on the 2nd Sunday of Advent, December 6, 1992. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

1. Kay isn't here this morning. I got a call on Friday morning from her mother saying that they were taking her sister, Lucy, to the hospital. The doctors' don't know for sure how much longer she had but they believe she's near the end of her terminal cancer. She was extremely nauseous. She was hallucinating. David, her husband, was concerned about her dying at home with the kids watching. Nobody was sure what the right thing to do was. Some articles in magazines counsel to let loved ones die at home. But some friends who've gone through the same situation counsel that she'd be more comfortable in the hospital.

Before Kay left for Lewistown she asked me, "Why does God allow a 35 year old mother, with three small children, die like this? Why does God let her linger?" I don't have the wisdom or understanding to know or answer her? All I can do is pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, you who are filled with the the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might; come and reign over us. Give us wisdom to know what to do. Counsel us to do the right thing. We're lost without you. We long, for your kingdom. Come, Lord Jesus, and establish your kingdom not only in our hearts, in the church, and in the world."

2. And then there is fear, pervasive fear all around us. Of course the thought of death casts a pall of fear over us. But there's also the fear of life and of the future in this world. A man says, "I'm really scared that our marines are

going to get bogged down in Somalia. I'm really scared that we're going to sucked into the conflict in Bosnia."

Someone else says with a worried look, "I'm afraid of the amount of our national debt. Each year more and more money is needed to pay the interest on the national debt; money that could be used for hospitals, health care, cities, education."

A man and woman married for a couple years say, "We're afraid to bring children into this world. The future is too uncertain. We're afraid of the cancer that the depleted ozone layer will cause. We're afraid of all this toxic waste and nuclear debris. We're worried over all the carcinogens in the air and the green house effect. We don't feel we can bring children into a world like this."

Increasing numbers of couples are saying this.

We fear losing our jobs. We fear paying our bills. We fear war. We fear the phone call late at night. We're anxious about how we'll support ourselves in retirement.

The one thing or person most of us don't fear is the Lord. We've come to have a kind of cozy, familiarity with God. We take God for granted. We presume upon God's grace and forgiveness. We break the law of God without any fear of the consequences. We pride ourselves on having come of age where it isn't psychologically healthy to fear the Lord. We feel relieved that the Presbyterian church no longer preaches hell fire and brimstone sermons. Presbyterians, especially, have been influenced by the Enlightenment view of religion which

leaves no room for religious fear. I'm half afraid to even talk about the fear of the Lord because I know that there's a lot of misunderstanding about it. Some of you, maybe, have ~~even scared~~ <sup>been traumatized</sup> by the religious fears you had as a child. Fear can be used to manipulate and abuse people. It can be a terrible weapon in the hands of a power hungry minister.

But, taking that into account, <sup>many of us have</sup> ~~we~~ come to believe that the Lord is a <sup>safe,</sup> tame and domesticated God, more of a heavenly psychiatrist, whose chief purpose is to make us happy and satisfy our felt needs. Polls indicate that a large percentage of people who go to church, go because it makes them feel better. It's what Dr. J.I. Packer calls "hot tub religion" which embraces anything that makes us feel better about ourselves.

But Isaiah speaks of the Messiah who has the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. A true knowledge of God and the fear of God go together. If we truly know the God revealed to us in Scripture, we'll both fear and love God.

Isaiah tells us that the Messiah's delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. Doesn't that sound strange. Delight and fear don't seem to go together. But when we truly know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God who has come to us in Jesus, we'll delight in the fear of God because that fear rescues us from all other fears. John Knox, the 16th century Scottish Reformer, said, "Fear God and no man." Because he feared God Knox had a sometimes reckless courage in the face of threats. Fear and delight in the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ and we need fear nothing else and no one else.

God is not mean. God is not vindictive or capricious. God is not abusive. But God is holy. God is to be feared with a holy and reverent fear, especially when we intentionally and willfully disobey his word and law.

Come, Lord Jesus, smite us and save us. Give us a healthy fear of the Lord. Change us, remake us, give us a new heart and mind and will so that we'll delight to know you. Rule over us. Judge us. Pour out your spirit upon us... the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.