

## ***And A Little Child Shall Lead Them***

An Interactive Message for Children's Day Worship with Communion

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

June 5, 2016

Text: Isaiah 11:6-9

I've been in ministry almost 30 years (gasp) and for a good chunk of that time I was devoted to children's and family ministry. As such, Children's Day services have always been a part of my portfolio of responsibilities – and one of my favorite Sundays of the year. There are lots of reasons for this. Children's Day is a time to celebrate the children, youth and families of the church and that's so very important to do. And, because the focus is on the children and youth, it's a time to be creative and spontaneous in worship – also a very important thing to do from time to time. This morning's service, including this message, will be just that – spontaneous and creative, hopefully. That means I have surrendered control of what will happen to the Holy Spirit and I am asking all of you to do the same trusting that the Holy Spirit always does amazing things when we get out of the way! So, here's the plan. We are going to make an attempt, working together – children, youth and adults – to make one of the most famous and beautiful Scripture texts from the Old Testament come alive right here in front of us!

As it happens, someone else became quite a famous attempting to do exactly this in a series of paintings he painted in

the 1830's. Edward Hicks was a Quaker Deacon and preacher and he was captivated by this text. This was, no doubt, because as a devoted Quaker, Hicks was a devout pacifist. His goal in all his paintings of this famous passage from Isaiah was to show people that what Isaiah was advocating could actually happen. That's why he painted it over and over again and his work has become quite famous. I have a small version of this painting and if I could have a volunteer, I will ask him/her to walk around the sanctuary to show you a picture of this very famous painting. (*Invite one child to do this. Continue while they are doing that.*) I wanted you to see this because we are going to try to bring this text alive this morning using ourselves as all the animals and people Isaiah describes in his vision of a peaceful future.

Here are the parts I need people for:

- Wolf > Lamb
- Leopard > Baby goat (kid)
- Calf > Lion
- Fatling (any baby animal) > Cow
- Bear > Asp – venomous snake
- Adder – another kind of small venomous snake
- 3 children

*(Identify people for each role and invite them forward. They should also be thinking about what sound the animal they are portraying will make. When all are assembled invite them to*

*make their sound. Then, invite them all to stand over to one side as the text is read. They will come over and join the others one at a time as the text invites them over.)*

So, are we ready? Here goes... *(Read through text slowly, inviting each “animal” or child over as they occur in the text. Then, when text is completed and tableaux is fully formed, move on to the questions.)* Let’s have a round of applause for our actors! *(pause)* Now, I am going to ask them to stay put for a few minutes while we talk about this text together:

- What phrases do you recall from the text? What stands out for you?
- What is the most striking image of the text? Why?
- What vision of the future does this text present?
- How realistic is this vision of the future? How do we get there?

*(As discussion concludes, thank “actors” for their assistance and invite them to return to their seats.)*

Edward Hicks thought this text was one of the most important texts in the Bible. He believed that if people could really understand it, really grasp everything it said in just a few sentences, the world could be changed. God’s promised Kingdom could become a reality on earth. And dear friends, that’s what we pray together every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer – “Thy

Kingdom come” we ask God every week. And Isaiah gives us a picture to hold on to of what that might look like.

Isaiah does one more vitally important thing in this text – he reminds us vividly that it is not a wise, important, powerful adult who will guide us forward into God’s promised kingdom. It is a little child. “And a little child shall lead them.” That’s because children show us all the time how to have faith, how to live faith, how to accept the reality of God in our midst. We tell them the stories. We teach them to pray. We teach them what it means to live as Jesus taught, loving God with all of who we are and all of what we have. But, friends, we must teach them or they will not know. And that is why this celebration of Children’s Day is so important in the life of every church. It reminds us of how very important children and youth and their families are in the life of the church. Of course! But it also reminds us even more forcefully that the effort put into fully incorporating children and youth and their families into the life of the church is vital for them and for the church and, indeed, for the future of this planet.

We live in a world changing faster than we can comprehend. So many things we have been able to take for granted are slipping away. And, if we are not paying attention, if we are not doing new things in new ways, if we are not taking risks and reaching out to others intentionally, joyfully and full of life in the Spirit right here in our church – the church may well be one of those things that

slips away from us as the post-modern, post-Christian, post-religious world spins faster and faster. The good news is that we can and we will and we are trying as best as we are able to move into God's future together here in this church. We are listening for the Holy Spirit's nudgings and we are looking for how it is that we can make a difference, a real difference, in the lives of this community now and in the future. The good news is lots of exciting new things are already bubbling to the surface here and more are in the pipeline. Dear friends, the church is changing because it has to if it is to survive.

Dear friends, our church is changing because it has to if it is to be around to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2064. There is one real question for us this morning as we celebrate the amazing, wonderful, incredible children and youth in our midst. God has already blessed us with what Isaiah promised over 3000 years ago – a little child will lead us, these children will lead us into God's future, if we are open to what they have to tell us, if we are open to what they have to show us. We have to do our part, certainly. We have to listen to their questions and suggestions as they and their families tell us what they need, what they think is important for the church to be about as the years ahead unfold. We have to work hard to make the answers to those questions, whatever they might entail, into reality right here in our church. We can do it. I know we can do it. The question is really not, "can we." It's "will

we” – will we follow the pathway they will reveal to us about God’s unfolding future for ourselves, our church and our world? Are we ready to follow where God leads us into the future? I think we are and these wonderful children and their families are proof of that. So, let’s get going! Amen.