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# GOD'S UNIMAGINABLE SUPRISES

AN ADVENT RESOURCE FROM GCORR

WEEK 2 - THE WOLF SHALL LIE WITH THE LAMB

## ISAIAH 11:1-10 (NRSV)

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 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. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 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. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious."

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## SERMON STARTERS

- So often Christians are challenged to interpret the Good News as that which brings about equality. For example, we've all been created in the image of God, equally. God loves each of us, equally. We've each got purpose in this world and it is important, equally. But in the text for today, the language is of equity (v4: but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...). Equality and equity are not the same. Equality ensures each person receives the same amount, treatment, opportunities, resources, etc. Equity, on the other hand, requires distribution based on righting past or present inequality. Equity sees how there hasn't been an equal distribution up until this point, and rectifies it. For example, let's say one person makes \$10/hour and another makes \$20/hour for the same job. If we apply equality, we add the same amount to each person's pay at the same time. If we have \$10 to

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offer, one person receives \$5 and now makes \$15/hour and the other receives \$5 and now makes \$25/hour. If we apply equity, the \$10 goes to the first person and they now make \$20/hour. The second person receives nothing extra and remains at \$20/hour. Sermons might consider how the Church (or your church) follows the equality model when equity is actually called for. In what specific ways could the Church enact equity in the Church, schools, or the community? What resistance do you think you might encounter within your church to the idea that this text is calling us to enact equity in order to work toward equality?

- Verse 6 begins that “the wolf shall live with the lamb.” Many sermons highlight how the surprise of God and the kin-dom allows for such an unlikely pairing. How is it that a wolf and a lamb could live with one another in harmony? Surely this must be the work of the miraculous! Wolves are predators and lambs are vulnerable. Wolves eat lambs, for goodness sakes. In what world, other than the kin-dom of God would wolves not be tempted to hurt lambs and lambs not be afraid of wolves? But there is another aspect of this story that preachers can attend to that might bring more surprise than that. What if, the wolf and the lamb not only live together, but work together to figure out why there's such an unequal power differential between them in the first place? The first paragraph highlights how lambs and wolves could live together at all because of the power differential. This option highlights interrupting and dismantling the power differential so that justice is done as well as relationships built. Similarly, work to “deal with” racism and other isms often focus on individual or interpersonal dynamics – i.e., how can we build relationships across racial difference. But the surprise of God this Advent could lead us toward interrupting and dismantling the structures and practices that sustain and protect the isms in the first place. Might it be that sermons could get at the institutional and structural aspects of isms to interrupt and dismantle them from the ground up? Then lambs and wolves will not only be in relationship – but they'll be in just relationship as well. If we start beating our “swords and spears” into tools that helps justice, love and encouragement grow?

## **CHILDREN'S SERMONETTE**

MATERIALS: Stuffed animal wolf & stuffed animal lamb.

SCRIPT: Good morning! Today we're going to talk about God's surprises.

A surprise is something we don't expect. When do we usually hear someone say, "surprise!"?

(NOTE: if no one says "birthday party" or "playing a joke on someone" or "jumping out to pretend to scare someone" you can add those)

Right, a surprise is something that shocks people. Surprises are things we don't expect. God surprises us too. Not with a birthday party – or by jumping out from behind a corner – but with things we don't expect.

In the Bible today, we will hear about a couple of God's surprises. (READ ISAIAH 11: 6)

There were 4 surprises in there. Three of them were about animals that usually don't hang around each other actually hanging around each other: wolves and lambs, leopards and baby goats, and calves and lions. (NOTE: hold up the stuffed animals)

What animals are these? (NOTE: children answer wolf and lamb)

Right, a wolf and a lamb – the stuffed animals look like they would hang out together right now, right? But in the world, wolves and lambs wouldn't hang out together – they eat different things and they've even been taught that they're enemies. The wolf has also been taught that's it's ok to hurt the lamb – and the lamb has been taught to be afraid of the wolf.

But the Isaiah story says that God wants to surprise us by creating a world where EVEN wolves and lambs will be friends – no wolves will hurt lambs and no lambs will have to be afraid of wolves. They might even have to teach their parents, teachers, and friends that this new kind of friendship exists because of God's surprises!

And God wants to do surprises in our lives too!! Isn't that exciting?? Maybe God will make a way for us to be friends with someone at school who doesn't have any friends yet. Maybe God will make a way for you and your brother or sister to get along better? Maybe God will give you the courage to stand up for someone who is being bullied? Maybe God is getting ready to tell you something else that we can't even imagine yet. That would be the biggest surprise of all!!

Let's pray together: Dear God – thank you for being a God of surprises. Help us see how you are surprising us by using us to make the world a better place. AMEN.