



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

[www.goodshepherdwi.org](http://www.goodshepherdwi.org)

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**Advent 3, Wednesday**

**December 14, 2016**

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### **“Healing From Decay”**

*(Isaiah 11:6-8)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; and 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den” (Isaiah 11:6-8).*

**Collect of the Day:** Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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The wolf lying down with the lamb? That's not the world we live in, is it? Put a wolf and a lamb together in a pen and my money is on the wolf. And would you ever let your child put his hand into the viper's nest?

Clearly, this passage doesn't tell us how the world is today. This is a prophetic passage. It's a passage that points to one day in the future. Today, the creation we know . . . the natural world we know is a food chain. It's filled with violence, death and decay. Wolves eat rabbits. Big fish eat little fish and omnivores aren't picky, nor are scavengers. Death is all around and there is universal dread of death. Hunger leads to aggression which leads to flight, fight or death. Paul summarizes it all by saying the whole creation groans (Rom. 8: 22).

Of course, it wasn't meant to be this way. This is not what God intended for the world. And that yawning gap between the way the world is, and the way the world was as God created it, is a result of man's will and man's sin, not God's. It all goes back to Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Before the Fall Eden looked a lot like Isaiah 11 here, with creatures living in harmony with one another.

Martin Luther had some fun imagining what Eden might have been like. "I am fully convinced" he writes, "that before Adam's sin his eyes were so sharp and clear that they surpassed those of the lynx and eagle. He was stronger than the lions and the bears . . . and he handled them the way we handle puppies . . . I believe Adam could command a lion with a single word, just as we give a command to a trained dog. And he was free to cultivate the soil to produce what he

wished . . . thorns and thistles were not in existence at that time. Similarly, I also believe that in those days the beasts were not as fierce as they are now. . . I hold that before sin the sun was brighter, the water purer, the trees more fruitful, and the fields more fertile. But through sin and that awful fall not only our flesh is disfigured by the leprosy of sin, but everything we use in this life has become corrupt (AE 1:62-64).

When it's icy outside, and we're on a hill or slope, I extend a hand to my wife. Often she's reluctant to take it and will leave a wide berth around me. She's worried I'm the one that's going to fall, and if I do, I'm going to take her and perhaps a few others with me. When Adam and Eve fell, they took the whole creation with them. "Cursed is the ground because of you" God said to Adam. "In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . . by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." To this day, that curse weighs on all creation. It wears us down and eventually grinds us back into dust.

So all creation is wrapped up in our story. When Adam and Eve fell, all creation becomes unglued, a shadow of its former goodness and beauty.

Today there's a temptation to romanticize nature, to see it only as a place of tranquility, peace, refreshment, inspiration and rejuvenation. But if you're somewhere lower on the food chain, if you're a rabbit, for instance, there are no such illusions. The rabbit always looks nervous and has good reason to: everything preys on them: cats, coyotes, raccoons, opossums, hawks and owls, dogs and humans. The rabbit has no illusions about nature being a place of tranquility and peace. The hungry chickadee flitting about your feeder keeps moving because she knows the neighborhood hawk is out there somewhere, and he's always hungry too. The little mouse will take his chances in your basement because he knows there's precious little warmth and food to be found outside. Yet today, the whole creation

groans under the curse uttered in Eden.

In the beginning God created all to live interdependently, in harmony. Now, under the curse, most creatures have turned antagonistic toward each other and toward us. Most of creation is afraid of us. In Genesis 9, God says to man, “Fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea.” And it’s because of us.

All creation is impacted by Adam’s fall. Your garden just doesn’t produce like it should. Some of the seeds you plant refuse to sprout. And some of the seeds you didn’t plant and would never plant have no trouble sprouting. In spring, hail or heavy rains pound seedlings back into the soil. In summer, scorching heat and dry wind sap the life out of them. In the fall, a killing frost wipes out whatever is left. And it’s in your garden where the rabbit gets his quiet revenge. Moreover, there are times in Wisconsin when the mosquitoes are so thick, so desperately thirsty for your blood, that it necessitated a sort of drive-by gardening, pulling weeds and picking fruit on the run. And all was for an apple.

Those mosquitoes, those battered plants, those thistles and stink weeds . . . they’re all little preachers shouting out, “This is not as God intended it to be. And it’s because of you! Not just Adam and Eve, but also their descendants, you and me!

God commanded us to care for his creation, as creatures among creatures. He gave us dominion over the rest of creation, and he intended it to be carried out benevolently and in harmony with God’s design, so that the whole creation can flourish. But our dominion has become reckless and destructive. The responsible stewardship of creation has turned into crass exploitation. Smoke stacks and mufflers belch poisonous gasses. Fertilizers and pesticides, dripping car oil and gasoline run into our creeks and rivers, choking the life out of them. With the commerce of ocean going vessels comes their ballast water, introducing

one invasive species after another into the Great Lakes. Not just because of Adam and Eve, the whole creation groans because of you and me.

So what's the answer? What can we do? Many trust that science and scientists will find ways of saving us. We just make a few more break-throughs in clean energy production and storage and all will be good. But scientific discovery is a god with a little g that has disappointed time and again. Think of it. How many scientific discoveries have there been in the last 200 years? And overall, is the creation better or worse off today than it was 200 years ago?

So what can we do? We can seek to limit the damage, and tend to the wounds we cause. For example, if it's true, it is unconscionable that we should throw out 40% of all the food we produce in America. Especially in a hungry world, it's unconscionable.

We can exercise self-restraint and live generously. We can purchase locally and conscientiously. We can invest in things with an eye for endurance rather than just price, things that can be repaired, and honor God by their craftsmanship. We can and should add insulation and switch out light bulbs, and invest in efficient transportation. We can reduce, reuse, recycle. We can and should do more.

In the end, however, the creation needs more of a savior than you and I can be to it. The creation needs more of a savior than scientific discovery can be to it. The creation needs more of a savior than the green movement can be to it. If Eden is to be restored, if the wolf is ever to dwell with the lamb, God is going to have to make it happen. If the leopard is ever to be with the young goat, we're first going to need a baby born in Bethlehem. If the lion is ever to eat straw like the ox, and the child play over the hole of the cobra, first this one born of Mary will have to die on a cross to reconcile the world to himself. If earth is ever to be created anew, Jesus must first return.

And the Good News, of course, is that most of those things have already happened. God so loved the world (the cosmos, the whole creation, all of it) that He sent his Son to

be born of a woman in Bethlehem. Adoring the infant lying in the manger are men and angels, stars too, and as tradition would have it, also animals. In the classic art, we almost always see sheep, or an ox and an ass peaking in on the manger scene. I like to think of them as ambassadors for the whole creation, with their hopeful eyes on the Savior too. Lying there in the manger is not just man's hope. He is the only hope of all creation.

Jesus shows us what it means to be human, embedded within creation, interacting with creation. He didn't do miracles just to prove he was God's Son. His miracles are aimed at reversing the curse of the Fall. He calms the storm. He heals the sick. He forgives sinners. He raises the dead. He speaks of God's care for even the sparrows and ravens. He feeds the thousands (without sweat of the brow!) and commands his disciples to gather the leftovers, 12 baskets full, food that came so easily, yet nothing is to be wasted. He calls us again to be stewards of it all. Then he goes to the cross for it all. His death impacts all creation.

The earth itself seems to know this, for it quivers when He dies at Calvary, and it quakes again when He is resurrected. The sun loses its light when Jesus closes his eyes in death, and it rises when He rises from the tomb.

Remember, creation's story is all wrapped up in our own. When man falls, all creation falls with it. When God redeems man, he redeems all creation, and has a plan for all creation. What is that plan? What will it look like? I don't think we should just write off Isaiah 11 as just poetry or figurative language. I like to think one day, a day not too long from now, in God's new creation, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; and 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the adder's den" (Isaiah 11:6-8). I like to think in God's

new creation they'll all be there, and we'll be there too . . .  
because of Him, Jesus, Savior of the world! Amen.

