

I. Introduction



A. Does anybody recognize who this is? (*solicit responses ...*)

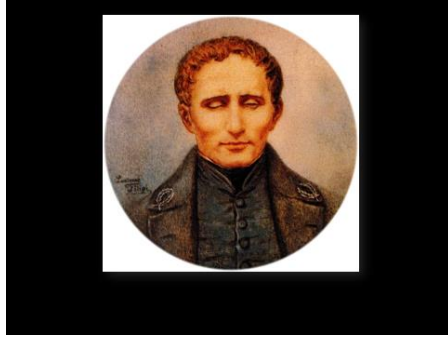
1. At age 15 this Swedish girl began spending her school days protesting outside the Swedish national parliament calling for stronger action on global warming
2. About 2 months ago her name,



Greta Thunberg

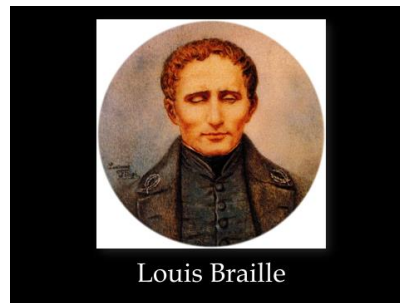
exploded into global awareness when she publicly confronted world leaders for their lack of action on climate change. This is Greta Thunberg.

3. This week she was again in the news speaking at the UN Climate Change summit in Madrid.
4. What remarkable leadership from a tenth-grader, speaking and modeling a message that most grownups did not have the courage to say! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg#cite_note-Rourke-21



B. What about this picture? Anyone recognize this young man? (responses again from people? If not ... explain it myself or have info provided by Eleanor H)

1. In English we'd say his name is Louis, but it was more accurate to call him [Lou-ee].
2. He lived in 19th C France, where at age 12 he first learned of an effort in the French army to communicate through a system of raised dots. By the age of 15 he had developed his own alphabet for blind people like himself to communicate on their own...



Louis Braille

3. His name is Louis Braille, and

- a) his touch-sensory alphabet for people with visual impairments opened up whole new worlds of reading and education for them, a system that we today take for granted ... <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/inspirational-stories/g5188/kids-who-changed-the-world/?slide=38>
- b) You can see and feel his alphabet in use here at church, on the signs on our restroom doors

II. These glimpses of youthful leaders like Greta Thunberg and Louis Braille also give us a small window into our OT reading for today, where the prophet Isaiah describes a



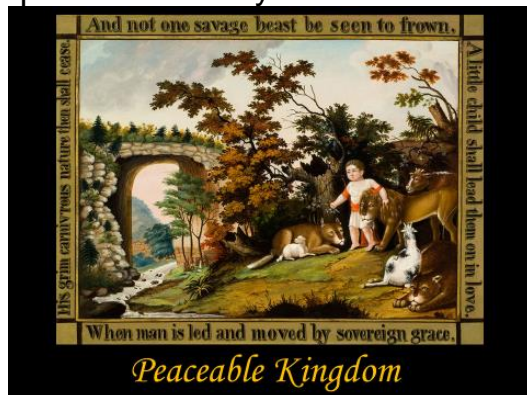
visionary scene

A. Isaiah presents a scene of a wonderful new kind of kingdom ... centered around a new ruler for God's people

1. It will be a ruler full of the Spirit of the Lord ... a Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel & might
2. This ruler will judge w/ righteousness & justice ... a faithful ruler who will pay attention to the poor and the meek

B. This new kingdom is not only centered around a great ruler descended from King David's father Jesse: **The rules & order of creation in this kingdom will look different**

1. In his lifetime the 19th C American artist Edward Hicks painted various versions of this Peaceable Kingdom scene, some of them quite famous. My favorite is this one,



Reynolda House Museum of American Art)

(Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch,

2. Predators and prey are lying down together – dangerous beasts & children are cohabitating ... no one hurts or destroys others
3. And in this new order of creation, all are led by this ruler who is ... a little child!

C. **What a bizarre kingdom** where children have a much more

important place & influence, than in our world today!

1. Here is the key image today of God's rule in this coming kingdom, : the image of a child as the leader
2. God sometimes turns things upside down & humbles us adults, who think we know everything & need to control everything.
3. God sometimes has childlike ways to show us that we do not have it all together as much as we think we do

Father John Westerhoff tells of an informal family communion service he celebrated during Lent one year. At that private worship time, he asked the group to name persons who they knew were suffering. A little girl sitting next to her father said, "My father's suffering, but he will not tell anyone."

While the priest was thinking how to respond, the girl began to hug her father. In embarrassment he said, "Oh, Beth, stop. You're going to hug me to death." And the girl exclaimed, "No, Daddy, I'm hugging you to life!"

III. John the Baptist also had a vision

A. Our Matthew text describe's John's vision of repentant hearts and transformed lives, all because God's rule had come near

1. John's was a vision of people getting a fresh start with God ... getting their sins washed clean
2. BUT for this to happen, there had to be proof of repentance, as John said quite bluntly to the Jewish religious leaders who had followed him out into the wilderness ...
3. John knew about their sorry-sounding words, pronounced while continuing to exploit people in the name of religion and in the name of doing good works.
4. And John said those hypocritical words did not count, in God's books!

B. John the Baptist is still speaking and calling out today

1. John calls us to lead lives different from the masses of people around us ... to turn our lives around in preparation for the One coming after him
2. As God's people we are called to live life differently from the world:
 - a) Our modeling, our inspiration for living doesn't come from Hollywood, or sports heroes.

b) It doesn't come from Madison Avenue or from the White House. It comes from Jesus Christ!

3. On our own power we will not usher in God's Peaceable Kingdom, but we are called to be signs of that kingdom today

a) We're called to be people of peace, laying aside our tendencies to prey on the vulnerable

b) We're called to be people demonstrating the same qualities that described that prophesied ruler in Isaiah:

(1) Wisdom, knowledge ...

(2) The fear of the LORD, and who judge with righteousness & equity

4. Being God's visible shalom people in a violent world means being clear about something: It requires repentance and change not only in our outward life, but also in here & here (*point to mind & heart*)

a) By our own efforts alone we will not bring the peaceable kingdom into place in the Peruvian Amazon or in Burkina Faso or here in Elkhart County

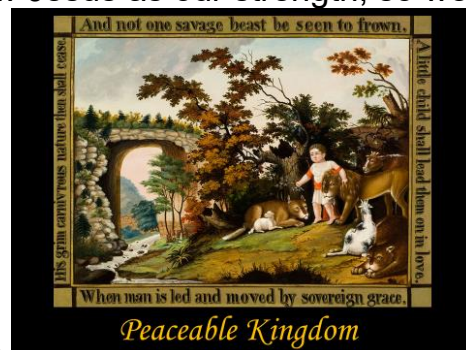
b) Outward efforts for peace (whether military force, or nonviolent school strikes and marches) still fall short of God's peaceable vision

c) It requires hearts transformed by God's love, not just outward shifts in behavior

C. Advent is precisely a season for softening and preparing our hearts to receive and give God's love

1. Having inner peace through a relationship with the God of peace does not guarantee an outwardly peaceful world for us ... but it is a prerequisite for true peace on earth

2. God wants us to work for outward peace because we've found inner peace ... because we know Jesus as our strength, so we don't



need to rely on worldly weapons

IV. Now as beautiful as The Peaceable Kingdom artwork is, **we**

know that the world we live in feels more like "dog-eat-dog"

A. Are there some small steps we can take toward the Peaceable Kingdom? Sure ...

1. At this time of year, venturing into the crowds at large retail stores can drive you nuts.

a) But imagine what it's like to be an employee having to work with all these customers ...

b) The peaceable kingdom comes closer when you give a smile, a sympathetic word, and a patient disposition as you interact with tired, harried store clerks

2. Instead of buying or watching violent video games, you can look for nonviolent video games to have at home

3. Choose to buy Xmas gifts from organizations that promote justice, like 10K Villages, or from any of a number of websites you will find if you simply Google "eco-friendly gifts"

4. Or better yet, rather than buying more tangible stuff, when so many of us don't really need more stuff ... try giving special experiences for Xmas, e.g.

a) Music or sports lessons for the kids

b) A special weekend trip away together with someone special

c) Certificates for free babysitting or for a meal supplied once a month

B. On this 2nd Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist calls us to bear fruits of repentance, while Isaiah invites us to live more like the vision of the peaceable kingdom. **How can we learn to do that?**

1. Perhaps we need to take our cues from Isaiah himself, by letting children lead us

a) E.g. With a little adult guidance on our values of making Christmas less wasteful and more focused on sustainability and relationships, maybe we actually ask our kids and grandkids how we should observe Christmas, and not just assume all the old traditions will continue ...

b) Like the little girl that the priest observed, maybe we need to "hug people to life" a little more often, and analyze & criticize them to death less often ...

2. When I pastored out in central Kansas, a 5th grade teacher in one of the local elementary schools had her students create something expressing their own visions of peace

Texts: Matt. 3:1-12; Isa. 11:1-9

(Advent 2) 7

- a) This is what the “peace project” sounded like in the words of a 5th grader named Mariah, who wrote:

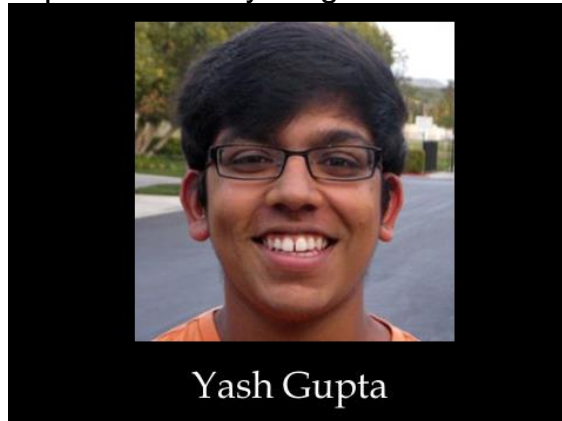
Peace is when you don't fight all the time and you're kind to each other. They are being dumb and being stupid. Let's get smart and work for peace. People always say that they'll put down their swords and stop fighting. The need to learn what peace is. ... It is love for all people.

- b) Maybe instead of taking our definitions and visions of peace from the TV news anchors, the bickering politicians, and top world leaders ... maybe we should listen more seriously to the profound truths of some of the children in our midst, and not quickly dismiss them as naïve fantasy ...
- c) For in fact, as 5th grade Mariah hinted at, in the long run all things that we fight over are dumb things, because violence never gets us the true & lasting peace we want ...

3. Through the words of children like Mariah, can we be simple enough to hear God's words about love and respect for all people, and not just for our own kind?

- a) Can we respect the dignity and worth of both ordinary peace-loving persons and radical extremists who spout hatred and intolerance?
- b) Can we extend God's love and dignity to all people residing in our country, no matter what documents they have or don't have?

4. Can we be creative and persistent enough to make a positive impact like this young man did?



- a) As a 14-year-old high school student in California, Yash Gupta broke his own corrective lenses, and waited a whole week for the replacements. This made him realize how difficult life is for children who need glasses but can't get any
- b) After reading a statistic that 12 million children around the world live without the glasses they need to see clearly, he decided to launch his own nonprofit organization called Sight Learning.
- c) This group has collected and given out over \$1.5 million worth of eyewear in places like Mexico, Haiti, Honduras and India.
(<https://sightlearning.com/>)

v. **Conclusion**

A. One of the big messages of this Advent Sunday is to repent

1. To turn our lives around, more to the model of the Jesus who came as a vulnerable child
2. As we learn from that child king, let us also learn from the child within us and among us.

B. Next Sunday it will be a treat in both worship services to see various adults and youth as well as the children, presenting their Christmas musical, "Camel Lot". We invite you to come back next week to be led in part by our children

C. This Advent and Christmas,

1. let us not be so sure, that we know what Christmas is all about, that we fail to let children minister to us ...
2. not so sure, that we refuse to allow children to teach us what receiving the Lord Jesus is about
3. May it be so!