



Christmas Eve 2015

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

A little child shall lead them...

Please join me in the responsive reading...

One: The wolf shall live
with the lamb
ALL: the leopard shall lie
down with the kid
One: the calf and the lion
and the fatling together
ALL: and a little child
shall lead them.

Really? A *little child* will lead us...? Such news would be fairly disconcerting, I think, to **many** of the current presidential hopefuls who *have-been-and-will-be* haunting *trade fairs*, *county fairs*, **small-town cafes** and **big city soirees** for most of the next coming year! Now, after watching segments of the recent presidential debates, I think it's safe to say that almost all of the candidates have proven that they are able to act child-ish – but I don't think that's what we're looking for!

A little child shall lead them...

Truth be told, I find that statement a little disconcerting **myself**. What management skills can these naive little ankle-biters offer to a hardened, hard-hearted and hard-to-live-in world? What leadership qualities can a **child** employ to address such complicated issues as: world hunger, terrorism, health care costs and the price of corn...?

Well, let's take a look at the qualities of children:

On the **negative** side: they can be impetuous, self-centered, and easily frustrated, they can't protect, provide or plan for themselves...

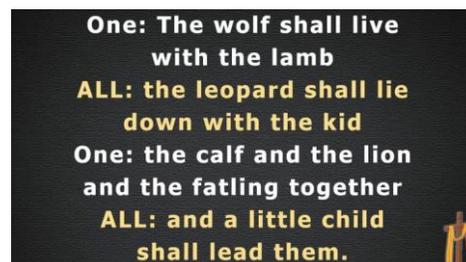


On the **positive** side: they're cute, trusting, and, when surrounded by caring adults, they're filled with...FAITH, HOPE and LOVE. Hmm...maybe **that's** the key – maybe it's **not** that a little child will **govern** us, but that a little child just might be able to *lead us into a blessed way of living!?!?*

I don't think that the prophet Isaiah imagined that a child would somehow fix the problems of any philosophical, theological, political or financial system, right? The world's problems will be our constant companions until Christ comes again.

Back after an election years ago, a significant shift occurred in the balance of political power in Congress. Many people were cheering the change.

Lots of folks were very **optimistic** that **finally** our government would get some good work done. Well, onto that fire of positive thought, a wise elder tossed a little splash of cold water when he said, *It's just gonna take a little longer for the pigs to find the trough...*



I am a **realist** when it comes to politics, ideologies, and the condition of the human soul. Whenever someone comes along who's convinced that they have something new to offer the world, I'm reminded of that famous verse from the book of Ecclesiastes: *there is nothing new under the sun. The more things change, the more they...stay the same.*

So what in the world **was** Isaiah talking about? Because we know what would happen if we put leopards in the goat pen – they’d only lie down to eat their kill. And we will not be able to convince lions to eat hay like the ox – they are predators and they like their meat fresh and *rare*...and haters will not let go of their anger... and terrorists will cause suffering and fear...and death will remain as the end of us all.

And yet...and yet...this is the **creation** into which Almighty God said, *The setting is **perfect**, the world is **ready**, the people are **primed**.*

And... this is the **moment** when Almighty God said, “The time is **right**, the day is **here**, the hour is **now**...”

So in Bethlehem, of Judea, a little child was born...under some incredibly challenging circumstances.

- His parents were not yet married
- no one was there to help with his birth
- he was born in a bare-boarded barn full of beasts
- he rested in a rough-hewn trough for feed...

It’s as if God were saying to the world – *my Son shall live as the lowest of the low...so that no one will feel excluded from my love...* That’s a word of **grace** for **everyone** – it’s a word of good news that **floods** our **lives** with **faith**, that **gives** our spirits **hope**, that **fills** our **hearts** with **love**!



And here is the key, I believe, to that ancient prophecy that a little child shall lead us. From the rough wood of the **manger** – all the way to the rough wood of the **cross** – there is a message that this particular child brings to the world. From the shepherds out in the fields who were frightened by the angels...to the thief on the cross who was frightened of death, the words from God ring clear and true: ***Do not be afraid...***

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A little child shall lead them...out of **loneliness**

I'll never forget a worship service a few years ago – during my sermon, I watched a little toddler slip out of her pew, quietly cross the aisle, go up a row...reach up and take hold of the hand of an elderly woman who was sitting on the end. They didn't know each other, but at that moment, they were friends...children of God together.

A little child shall lead them...out of **confusion**

Picture an elderly man who wears a slight but perpetual frown because everything seems so confusing. Names and faces don't match-up like they used to, and conversations are hard to follow. Then picture that face when his great-

grandson climbs up into his lap: the frown melts away as a smile fills his face with delight...

A little child shall lead them...out of **prejudice**

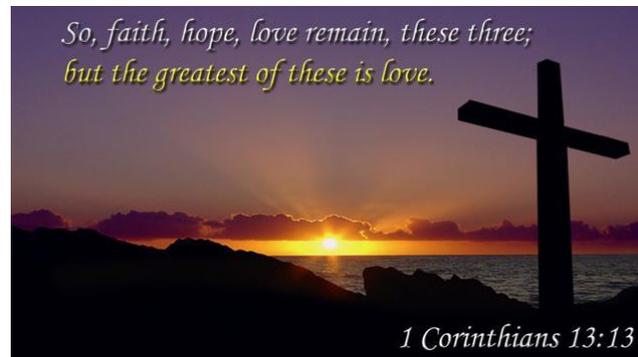
Imagine two little girls sitting on a couch – one looks like she’s fresh off the boat from Norway, the other looks like she belongs to people who roamed this land for centuries.

My brother walks into the room and says, *Well, there’s my little Chocolate and Vanilla!* Blond-haired, light-skinned, blue-eyed Rachel yells, *I’m chocolate!* Then black-haired, dark-skinned, brown-eyed Fallon yells, *I’m vanilla!* And we all laugh – the girls because they’re thinking of their favorite ice cream flavors; and the adults, because we know how delightful is their innocence...

A little child shall lead them...into **generosity**

Two weeks ago, Keaton Nelson, a 9 year old boy from West Fargo who has cystic fibrosis, got to act out his dream – and the Make-A-Wish Foundation helped him do it. His great desire? To dress up like Santa and deliver toys and candy to all the children in the hospital.

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As the Apostle Paul says, at the end of 1st Corinthians 13, *Now, faith, hope and love remain, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

I hope and pray that it's true – for you, for me, and for the sake of our world, that a little child just might be able to lead us into a blessed way of living.
Merry Christmas...Amen.