



Keep painting the picture!

On Sunday, I included this painting, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, in the service. It was painted by someone who loved Isaiah 11:1-9 even more than I do - American folk painter and Quaker minister Edward Hicks!

Hicks painted this scene over 62 times in his lifetime (April 4, 1780 – August 23, 1849)! Although he relied on decorative painting to support his family, records suggest he gave many of these Kingdom paintings as gifts to friends and family to express his desire for God's kingdom of peace as described in Isaiah.

As well as the animals and children lying down in peace together in the foreground, you can see, in the background, a scene from America's colonial past—the founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, signing a treaty of perpetual friendship with the Lenape Indians in 1681 (or 1682 or 1683). In this way Hicks was preaching (and painting) what these values of peace and justice could look like in practice.

In some of his other Kingdom paintings, in place of this treaty scene, Hicks paints a congregation of Quaker figures unfurling a banner with the words the angel spoke to the shepherds, "*Peace on earth and goodwill to men.*" Alternatively, the banner reads, "*Mind the light within,*" a reference to the Quaker doctrine of the inward light, Christ indwelling believers, and showing them the way of equality, peace, simplicity, and justice.

Another feature of some of these paintings (which relates to our recent painful Baptist history) is the inclusion of a blasted tree trunk, representing the 1827 Hicksite-Orthodox schism within the Society of Friends, the first in the denomination's history. However, this

also doubles as a reference to the “*stump of Jesse*” from which God’s righteous ruler will come (Isaiah 11:1).

As he got older, Hicks became increasingly disillusioned about the human capacity to release God’s vision of the peaceful kingdom and this attitude is reflected in his work. According to ‘Art & Theology’ blogger, Victoria E. Jones, “*While his early Kingdom paintings from the 1820s show animals in joyful company with one another, the animals in many of his middle- and late-period paintings are tense or exhausted, or even bare their teeth in open hostility. In some... noticeably in the one from the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum (detail below)—Christ’s hold on the lion’s mane is one of forcible restraint rather than gentle guidance.*”



And yet – and this is what I find amazing – he kept on painting the picture! He wrote in his *Memoirs* that although internal church division had destroyed his hope of seeing, in the here and now, a kingdom like the one Isaiah had envisioned, this realisation had caused him to “*cling to Christ all the more tightly*”. And to keep painting the picture.

And this is what we were doing on Sunday as we blessed one lorikeet, a flock of finches, two spiny leaf insects, two guinea pigs, three cats and twenty-five dogs – blessing the animals for the 11th time – and blessing a lot of people in the process! We were continuing to paint a picture of the world that God is creating – God’s kingdom of peace.

And as I woke up this morning – and heard the news that Israel had launched strikes on Gaza again after accusing Hamas of violating the ceasefire agreement by attacking a soldier – I thought this is what I need to do – cling to Christ, and keep painting the picture – for, “*a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and...the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him....*”

Grace and peace!

Belinda