

The Isaiah Readings

Isaiah 11:1-10 | Advent 2016

PARTICIPANT SHEET #2 All You Have to Do is Look

ENTRY POINTS *By Janice MacLean*

Contemplative vision invites us to take “a long and loving look at the real.” It’s not always going to call forth delight because we know all too well that “the real” includes sin and war, poverty and crime, illness and death. Keep looking with contemplative vision though, and you’ll begin to decipher God’s presence in it’s midst.

Edward Hicks kept looking. His signature painting was called “The Peaceable Kingdom.” It’s based on the Isaiah prophecy. Edward Hicks was born in 1780.

The first version of “The Peaceable Kingdom” was finished in 1820 and he revised it until his death in 1849. Do you know how many know variations there are? 61. Sixty-one times, Edward Hicks adjusted and revised his Peaceable Kingdom.

His story is interesting. His early renditions of “The Peaceable Kingdom” were of a very simple image with a mixture of wild and domestic animals together and always centrally included a child. Hicks was a Quaker and his belief that insight (seeing) was open to all, shaped his life and his painting.

His middle paintings still show the wild animals seemingly domesticated but there are unsolved issues. His concern about divisions in his Quaker faith and oppression in the world around him are revealed through a tree that appears as if struck by lightning, splitting it. This divided tree remains a major part of many paintings.

Over the passage of time, the 61 paintings are flooded with hopes and dashed hopes. The children play a less central role. The animals become visibly older: white whiskers and sad, sunken eyes. In some there is the figure of William Penn, who forged a treaty with the Native Peoples, which Edwards Hicks saw as a sign of the possibility of the peaceable kingdom yet it is separated from the foreground by a ravine.

Then there is his last picture. There is a “gloriously rendered” sense of light: Half the painting is a luminous sky. The farm, with the bulls, sheep, pigs, fences, barns, people, living and dead, are saturated in light. They are giving off light. Even the lion is full of light. In this last painting, Edward Hicks allows us to see the Light coming out of all living beings and the world. Hicks believed in the Inner Light and its power; he felt it and therefore he saw it.

Hicks had contemplative vision. He saw Light – even through the lens of hopes and dashed hopes.

Isaiah had contemplative vision. Out of something that appears hopeless, lifeless, left behind, comes the sign of new life – a green sprig. “A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Isaiah goes on to say, ‘See that and anything is possible, even a peaceable kingdom.’