

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. *Isaiah 11:6*

### **And a Little Child . . .**

Yesterday I worshipped with a church I rarely visit, Good Shepherd Taiwanese Presbyterian Church. I know that most of the congregation understands English, because I told them that I often see churches when they are experiencing problems, so the fact that they never see me is good news for them—and they all laughed before the Elder Henry Liao could translate for me!

But this was a celebration, their 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And from the looks of it, the church is vibrant, and well-positioned to continue serving and celebrating as they transition to the next generation. In fact, this has always been the great gift of this church: their commitment, from the beginning of the church, to include the younger generations. They don't just take care of them, but proactively think about them, listen to them, bring them into leadership, and invest in their ministry. All generations are present in worship, and the energy of the younger generations is evident everywhere on the church campus. One thing I noticed this weekend is that the worship is much more bilingual (Taiwanese and English) than before. I always wondered about the young people in worship when everything was in Taiwanese, because immigrants' children who are born in the United States almost always prefer to worship in English. In the past, this church held to Taiwanese in worship, and the younger folk loved the church so much they strained to follow the gist of the worship service. But now, nearly everything was presented in both languages, which I expect is appreciated—at least by me!

My sermon, focused partly on Isaiah 11:1-10, touched on the radical change that had to happen if Isaiah's prophecy is to take place, and that John the Baptist's condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees seemed to be against their complacency, assuming their salvation was based on their status, rather than active faith. But the call to bear fruit was proclaimed, with force and not a little threat.

It occurred to me that John's call for repentance exposed a mistake that we all make—that we want the good news to come, but without having to face the disruption of change. One night when I was reading through the Isaiah passage, a pack of coyotes went on the attack outside my house. It sounded awful as they screamed and howled, but of course I wasn't going to open my door for fear of my little dogs getting out. And it occurred to me—how would the lamb feel when the wolf came to live with her, or the baby goat when the leopard lay down next to him? And what mother would risk having her baby play near the pit of a cobra? And what father would let his child put their hand into the nest of a poisonous snake? In order to live into God's new world, we have to go beyond our fears, and trust God's wild, Holy Spirit.

Immediately after my sermon, the children were to present a couple of songs. There was a delay before the doors opened and they came down the aisle, and I was reminded how children's sermons can be the times in worship when anything can happen. The children did enter eventually, and came up to the chancel. It was a pleasant problem that the children had a hard time fitting in the chancel, especially because they had some hand flags they would use in the second song. So they came up, knocking the pulpit with the flags, and as the teachers were trying to position them to lessen the chance of them knocking each other, I could see one boy in the back who couldn't help but dance! And he was pretty good, too!

In that moment, I was struck with the power of this teachable moment, when the kids were leading in worship and teaching us all what the wild, Holy Spirit looks like!

On this 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there were many very precious moments for me, like when one of the founders of the very first Taiwanese Presbyterian church in Los Angeles, Formosan on Olympic Boulevard, came up to me to tell me how he sees the name “Tajima” in his hallway every day (his son was awarded a college scholarship as the editor of the *Moor*, the weekly school newspaper of Alhambra High School, where my father taught journalism for 35 years). And David Huang, the organizing pastor of Good Shepherd Taiwanese, is still full of vigor at 89 as we talked about the church’s commitment from the start to focus on raising up each new generation. And Ming Hsu, the current pastor, and lead elder Henry Liao told me about their new plan to create an outdoor space for the young people at the church, including a meeting area and a basketball court.

As we continue in Advent, we continue to recall the legacies of the past, such as the faithful prophets who shared God’s promises of a restored future, and we recognize the power of a legacy that includes welcoming the holy unknown, such as the Christ child and also the leadership of future generations in our own churches. Thank God for prophets who dared to empower the next generation to do what their parents never imagined! May we be open to wonder and joy and new life—and all the changes new life brings—as we live into the kin-dom of heaven that came with Jesus’ birth.

With Advent hope,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wenling", written in a cursive style.