

*Based on Isaiah 11:6-9. Wolves and lambs and snakes, oh my!*

Those of us who came of age in the height of the Cold War in the mid-1980s might remember the lyrics of the English songwriter Gordon Sumner, also known as *Sting*, from the song titled simply “Russians.” As Khrushchev and Reagan and Thatcher sound the drumbeat of nuclear war, Sting sings: *We share the same biology, regardless of ideology. What might save us, me and you, is if the Russians love their children, too.*

Thirty five years later, according to *Newsweek*, a Council of Mothers and Wives of Russian soldiers sent to fight in Ukraine openly criticize the “shameful” behavior of their current President and demand a meeting to address their grievances and bring their loved ones home.

If recent history is any indication, clearly the Russians love their children. The question is, do we?

Ten years ago this month, to our great horror, we watched the horrific aftermath of ammunition from military grade weapons ripping through the bodies of twenty children at Sandy Hook Elementary School, along with their teachers, their principal, and their school psychologist. Today, instead of practicing drills in case of a nebulous nuclear attack from a geo-political enemy on the other side of the planet, our children practice active-shooter drills in case of an all-too-probable massacre from within their own communities. According to the data collection and research group Gun Violence Archive the number of children and youth who have been injured or killed in gun related violence in the ten years since Sandy Hook, as of 7:00 this morning, was 26,636.

It is time to start treating the very “hot” war on our children with the same urgency with which we treated the Cold War. What might save us, when it comes to gun violence, is if *we* can find a way to love our children, too. And not just our children, but every one of those 26,636 children sacrificed to guns, *as if they are ours*. (Because they are.)

This is the vision Isaiah holds out in the Lesson before us today. In a massive transformation of their inner predatory nature, the wolves of the world have learned to love the children of the sheep. In a massive transformation of their inner predatory nature, the leopards of the world have learned to love the children of the goats. In a massive transformation of their inner predatory nature, the lions of the world have learned to love the children of the cows. And in a massive transformation of their inner predatory nature, the snakes have learned to love the children of the humans.

This is not just mere *tolerance* of one another’s children. This is not just *allowing* the children of each species to study safely, separately in their own schools. This is not that the wolf and the leopard and the lion and the snake have signed a peace treaty with the sheep and the goats and the cows, with armed guards to protect the boundaries of their own territory.

This vision is about figuring out a way to transform the predatory instinct into practices of compassion so that *all* of God’s Beloved Children can live and play and work together! In this vision, the predatory instinct has

been so transformed that Mama Ewe and Mama Goat and Mama Cow *actually trust* the wolf and the leopard and the lion and the snake *with their children!*

When we love our children, Isaiah says, we *know God*. And when we know God, Isaiah says, ALL of the children of every human - and every non-human - on the planet become “our” children. And this is how we have peace.

So how do we do it? I mean *how* do we actually *do* it?!

We *think* we do it, don't we? We point the finger at others we are quite certain *don't* do it. We have tried legislative activism, we have tried holding manufacturers of guns accountable for the harm they have caused, we have tried bankrupting Sandy Hook deniers - with some degree of success! - still, between 7pm last night when I finished this sermon and 7am this morning when I re-checked the Gun Violence Archive to make sure my statistics were accurate, four more children had been added to the list.

It is time to try something new. Or, to be more accurate, it is time to try something ancient. It is time to try something like *turning swords into ploughshares*, according to the vision of Isaiah. It is time to try literally taking the instrument of war that is killing our children and turning it into a tool of peace.

This is what our Guns to Gardens Ritual of Reflection and Action will do next Saturday. Gathering in the sanctuary for prayer and reflection, processing to the parking lot in silence, blessing the saw, praying for an inner transformation that matches the outer transformation of two guns into two gardening tools.

Make no mistake. Even with “just” two guns, *this ritual matters*. The physical act, in community, of singing and praying and offering and sawing and releasing and re-forming *matters*. With the hope - and the expectation - that the physical act of sawing and releasing and re-forming a gun will translate into a spiritual sawing and releasing and re-forming the warlike nature that dwells within each of us. *This* is how we have peace.

The Sufi mystic Hafiz reminds us that *Someone who knows God has dropped the cruel knife that most so often use on their tender self and others*. The prophet Isaiah says those who know God *shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain*. When we drop the knife, when we transform the gun, when we lead with compassion for the young of every land and species, maybe there really *can* come a day when the predatory nature of humanity has been so transformed that we have finally learned to live in peace with God and with one another and with the rest of creation. *What might save all of us, me and you, is if* in this Advent Season, Transformed by Compassion, we truly learn to love God's children, too.