

At Home, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. A2041205
Isaiah 11:1-10 and Romans 15:4-13
Elon Community Church, UCC, 5 December, 2004

The prophet and the apostle both write words of hope and peace. That is what we anticipate as we prepare for the great celebration of Christmas. If we can keep those visions of hope and peace in our minds during the next few weeks, we may be able to survive the season! We may well find salvation! Christmas is the day we celebrate the fact that God loved this world enough that God was willing to make a home here on this earth. The question is, will God find a home in our hearts? Will God find a home in this church?

What could be more different than a lion, a leopard, a lamb, a cobra and a nursing baby? The prophet Isaiah has a vision of these naturally antagonistic creatures living in peace with one another. That is the vision of what God has planned for us.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, a church containing the diversity of Jew and Gentile. These were antagonistic peoples. They came from different cultures. They had different customs and habits. Gentiles were outsiders. How could these diverse people ever get along with each other? Paul says that the God of steadfastness and encouragement will grant that they can live in harmony with one another. How can that happen? By some sort of miracle? Yes: the miracle of hospitality.

Paul asks his readers to welcome each other as Christ welcomed them. That is the vision of what God has planned for us. With Jesus Christ as the center of their faith, Jew and Gentile together could worship God and live in peace with each other.

The visions of prophet and apostle inform our vision of church. The people of God will live in peace and harmony with one another. Indeed, all people will find a home here. This is not the peace of solitude. This is not the peace of uniformity. This is the peace of loving dialogue. This is the peace we find when the God revealed by Jesus Christ is at the center of our corporate life. This is the peace we find when all people can say, "I'm at home here."

It was Robert Frost who wrote, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in."¹ Margot Pickett, co-minister at Pilgrim UCC in Durham tells the story of the senior minister of a large church nearby who told her to expect a family to visit her church because they didn't feel comfortable at his. Margot watched for the new family, but they didn't show up that week, nor the next. Finally more than a month later, two women showed up with three adopted children of different races and with disabilities of various sorts. The church welcomed them and they became involved in Sunday school and in other activities. One day, one of the women came to Margot in wonderment and said, "You have made us feel so welcome here. You have even let us teach Sunday school and serve on boards. In our previous church we were not allowed to teach or to serve on boards because of our family situation." When anyone comes here we have to take them in and make them feel at home.

The United Church of Christ has caused quite a flap this week. The NBC and CBS networks have denied airing an advertisement as too controversial. So, let me get this straight. It appears that it is okay for drug companies to advertise drugs that provide prolonged sexual intimacy. It's okay for beer companies to purchase air time for commercials with scantily clad women wrestling. It's okay to show violence and mutilated bodies. It's okay to air shows depicting sexual activity between teenagers and men and women who aren't married to each other, but

¹ Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man," 1915

when a church wants to buy commercial air time for an advertisement that says it welcomes everyone, these two networks say “No. It’s too controversial!”

Today’s is the last of a series of five sermons dealing with what we believe God is calling this congregation to be and to do. Our fifth calling is,

Elon Community Church will provide the opportunity for diverse theological viewpoints to be held without being judged by other church members. We believe that the judging is best left to God. As part of the body of Christ, we intend to appeal to people of all races and lifestyles and to allow individuals to search, discover and flourish in the Christian faith. *We are here to help people find a home in this community of faith.* [Italics added.]

That is so important: to help people find a home where they can explore their relationship with God without judgement.

This is a place where all people can find a home. A neighboring church proudly advertizes that it is “not your grandmother’s church.” Well, grandma is welcome here. And so is grandson with the Mohawk haircut, and so is the single parent, and so is the interracial family, and so is the Biblical literalist, and so is the religious liberal. You see, this is not *our* church, this is *God’s* church. And in God’s church, diverse creatures find themselves gathered together in worship.

How do the diverse creatures of Isaiah’s vision get along with each other? Isaiah says, “The wolf shall live with the lamb... and a little child shall lead them.”² A little child has not yet learned to fear. We need not fear those who are different than we are. We’ve got God!

A little child has not yet been taught to hate. We will not hate those whom God has created, and God has created all!

A little child has not yet been taught to judge itself greater or lesser than others. We will not judge our faith as the correct faith nor anyone else’s as a wrong faith.

A while ago, I said Paul asked his readers to welcome each other as Christ welcomed them. Do you remember whom Jesus welcomed to that last supper? He welcomed a tax collector, one who would betray him, one who would deny him, and all who would run away when the going got tough. You and I, who are no better than those disciples, are invited to this table set by Jesus.

You are at home here.

²Isaiah 11:6