

Day 2

Yesterday we looked at the context of Isaiah. We drew parallels between his context and our context. We noted that

- We find ourselves in a context similar to Isaiah's
- We find ourselves surrounded by women who have been stripped off their names and rights, women in society, in the secular world and in the church.
- We said We find ourselves in a divided house
- We noted that find ourselves in paradoxical times and in a state of Spiritual emergency
- We agreed that we daily witness glaring economic inequalities

Today, we go into the actual text. Now that we find ourselves in the same page as Isaiah and his context, **let us see what the text has to say to us**. Remember I said, **Isaiah had a dream. The PB has a dream. I have a dream**. Let us today **go back to the animal kingdom**. Let us do what an Anglican priest and theologian, Andrew Linzey calls, **Animal Theology**.

Isaiah prophesied using the imagery of animals and today I would like to unpack some of the imagery he used.

I propose that the usage of the imagery by Isaiah speaks of transformation. Transformation of thoughts, words and action is crucial for the breaking of barriers.

Allow me to focus on some of relationships mentioned in the verses 6-9. Let me remind you of these verses. Isaiah 11verse 6-9

6. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

7. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into a vipers' nest.

9. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Animal theology. We have a dream.

1. The imagery speaks of: Top to bottom transformation

The author in the ensuing verses always pairs the animals in this manner: the strong and weak, the hunted and the hunter, the prey and the predator.

In the imagery, I want us to first note that the wolf is mentioned first in relation with the lamb, he is mentioned as the one who dwells with the lamb.

At the reading of the verse of the wolf and the lamb together, I am convinced that it is the one on top, the one who is in power, who approaches the lamb and lies with the lamb. The Leopard is the one who lies with the goat. **We have dream for a “top to bottom” approach to transformation.** The choice of the wording of the author to portray the powerful as the initiators of this justice is profound. The one who are strong and capable of domination are actually stronger when they choose not to use their power and they choose to remain docile for the sake of justice.

In **arranging his words in such a manner**: Isaiah was actually then pronouncing in his context where rulers were in dispute, kingdoms divided, the elite enjoying the spoils of the land, he was pronouncing that they, the wolf and the leopard **must come down** to the level of the lamb and the goat in order for barriers to be broken. Remember, yesterday I said: We are familiar with a Christ who was incarnate and emptied himself into human form whilst remaining divine. I also said: We are a people familiar with Charles Wesley speaking to our conscience when he writes of Christ and says, "He **left his father's throne above, so free so infinite his grace, emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adams' helpless race.**" **The wolf and the leopard must come down from the throne above and empty themselves. In the opening service, the Rev Malinga spoke of Jesus humbling the wolf and exalting to lamb. Top to bottom transformative power.**

What is then the relationship between wolves and sheep, leopards and goats respectively? Wolves and sheep are natural enemies, leopards and goats are also natural enemies. Sheep and goats have no sense of protection when hunted by wolves and leopards respectively.

When oppressed by the wolves and leopards, the sheep and goats get stripped off their names and rights. In this conference, there are wolves and sheep, Leopards and goats. I have a dream.

When oppressed by the wolves and leopards, women get stripped off their names and rights. **When oppressed and hunted by the wolves and leopards ethnic groups get stripped off their names and rights.** Race groups become a forgotten minority. **When oppressed by the wolves and leopards the LGBT community get stripped off their names and rights.**
I have a dream

When oppressed by the wolves and leopards poor circuits get stripped off their names and rights to have a minister, whilst districts and organisations raise millions for misplaced priorities. **When oppressed by the wolves and leopards the poor get stripped off their names and rights.** When oppressed by the wolves and leopard's **student in tertiary institutions get stripped off their names and rights. I have a dream.**

On speaking on Wolves, Aesop's fables narrate this fable:

“Once upon a time a wolf was lapping on a hillside. When looking up, what should he see but a lamb just beginning to drink a little lower down. “There’s my supper, he thought, if only I can find some excuse to seize it.” Then he called out to the lamb, “how dare you muddle the water from which I am drinking?”

“No master no, if the water is muddy, I cannot be the cause of it, for it runs down from you to me.” “Well then, said the wolf, why did you call me bad names this time last year?”

“That cannot be,” said the lamb, “I was only six months!”
“I don’t care said the wolf, if it was not you it was your father!” And with that he rushed to the poor little lamb and ate her all up. But before she died she said, “Any excuse will serve a tyrant.”

“Top to bottom” transformative power does not look for excuses to marginalise and blame the lamb in order to get what power wants but it recognise that “I the wolf, I the

leopard” am fallible to seeking control and dominance to the extent of sacrificing the lambs.

Even when the lamb seems to be muddling long standing water of patriarchy, tribalism, racism homophobia, spiritual bankruptcy and economic disparities, Waters that have stood unshaken for centuries favouring the wolf and the leopard, it was never the lamb that muddled the water, it was the cries of dispossessed daughters of eve that ebbed and flowed until the current came in and the wolf was forced to lie with the lamb. The lamb ran with the wolves.

Top to bottom transformative power recognises the strong current, the dawn of a new day and does not resist it by demonising the lamb. I dream of the day when the wolf and leopard will have no excuses but will sit with the lamb and the goat. **I have a dream.**

We therefore all possess transformative power. The key is to recognise the, “Wolf under sheep’s clothing,” and the “leopard that never changes its spots,” in ourselves and seek to set the lamb and goat free. Wolves and Leopards, those

in power bring about transformation when their practice is one that displays lying with the lamb and the lying.

Ngethe and Haines in the article, “Transformative power of practice,” **define practice as repeatedly doing something to the extent that repetition compels it into becoming behaviour thus practice.**

They go on to state that we have default practices, practices that we do automatically and consistently and even unconsciously in response to situations. Most times an individual allows this default action to dominate to the extent that the response, action and behaviour becomes irrelevant and often does not align to present day values and norms. Transformative power of the wolf and leopard begins when the wolf and leopard begin to examine their default practice.

Transformative power is intentional in its practice, it places the once forgotten lamb at the front of the battlefield, and says, **“show us what you have Oh dear lamb, we will not leave you now that you are in the front, we will not trap**

you to expose your weakness because we have our own, we are in this together... lead us dear lamb.” That is the intentionality of transformative power. **I have a dream.**

Not only does the wolf sit with the lamb and says, “its ok, stay in the corner, we accept you lamb, you are our equal and you are Gods image, we want to use your talents to grow the kingdom,”

not only does **the leopard sit with the goat and says, “you are different you go against created order as revealed in scripture,”** but transformative power is intentional in creating room for the lamb and goat to flourish, lead the pack, the tribe and the kingdom and be an equal role player in the jungle. **The wolf and the leopard must be intentional. That is Top down transformative power. However, there is also what I call, Bottom up transformation.**

The imagery speaks of Bottom to top transformation

The dynamics between the animals reminds me of the debate between Marxist philosophers such as Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong. Lenin was of the view that

transformation could be achieved when the middle class and the elites are leading the way.

Zedong in response to Lenin disagreed with this view and maintains that **transformation should be driven by the poor who will then work hand in hand with the middle class and the elites.**

Isaiah also seems to have had foreknowledge of these theories. In the imagery used, **he begins by talking on transformation from the top-bottom approach i.e. wolf and leopard but later on** in the passage **in fact captures also the idea of a bottom-top transformation** it in the very same passage when he says, **7. The cow will feed with the bear.**

The authors' sequence of words and the impression he creates in mentioning the **cow first, leaves one with the idea that the weaker of the two i.e. the cow, grew tired of living in fear and in the margins, she takes the risk and goes to the bears' grazing ground.** The **cow could not be silenced any longer. Biko comes in and says, "You the oppressed are accountable for your own oppression, you have allowed yourself to have inferiority complex."** You do not have to have self-pity, cow, lamb, goat-you are beautiful

and you have dignity. **The reaction of the wolf, the leopard and the bear towards you does not change your value and potential. Go to the bear, go the powerful and sit with the bear and negotiate. Remember, redressing the harm created by the system requires negotiations, it cannot be conducted by force. I have a dream.**

The imagery calls for Togetherness

Instead of a top down and bottom up model of transformation, **Theodore Jennings proposes an alternative.** He proposes togetherness in our fight against barriers. **I have a dream. How does he do that?**

Jennings, on speaking on Wesley in the context of slavery and oppression highlights the fact that Wesley found it appropriate to preach against any injustice and oppression to the extent that he held prayer meetings and vigils for the liberation of the oppressed. **The problem of the oppressed was not solely theirs but it was a communal, there was togetherness in dealing with the problem for when one part of the body is injured, the whole body is affected.** I have a dream that the lamb, the cow and the goat and will have voices of the entire connexion **together** echoing

through prayer, preaching and actions, “Barriers must fall.” Grant us Lord the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can and wisdom to know the difference. I am convinced that there are many things we can change. I am still convinced that at the breaking of Barriers mission can be ignited and I am further convinced that at the igniting of authentic mission, barriers can be broken.

A Revolution, exile is avoidable if we elevate the lamb and lower the wolf, if every valley is exalted and every mountain lowered thus creating equilibrium and a safe space for working together in our mission. My fellow Methodist listen to the voice of the spirit of God which is whispering: A revolution is coming, if it is not here already. However, it is avoidable, perhaps, only if we listen to Isaiah’s prophetic imagination. Let us draw from this animal theology.

Discrimination in any form is everybody’s business because we are together, a discipleship movement. If that does not happen, exile from one another, Exile from our

Wesleyan roots, exile from our very own mission and vision and exile from God is inevitable. **I have a dream.**

The rhetoric on tribalism, racism and patriarchy cannot be limited to leadership positions. This seems to be the case and trend at the moment. Maybe that is why the PB moved the discourse of for example tribalism from leadership positions to worship because our approach is very narrow. Maybe that is why Rev Malinga moved the discourse on tribalism from leadership to a case where a Zulu leader, empties and transcends her Zuluness to being a servant to all.

Having 50% of every race, gender and tribe represented in leadership positions does not even begin to address the barriers. That is casually pseudo community. We are starting with number last....

Together we need to intentionally build relationships and trust and the rest will follow.

The imagery speaks of Legacy

Isaiah continues to say in reference to cows and bears, “their young ones shall lie down together:” **Animal**

behaviour is imitated behaviour. Animals group themselves according to their species (or should I say, ethnic group or even better, gender group or race groups or age groups) and the old teach the young the ways or culture of the animal. Sometimes the animal does not even understand what they are doing but they imitate cause they were indoctrinated.

It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks but in this dream, in this prophetic imagination the old will realise that a legacy of a wolf fighting with the lamb does not work, a bear fighting with the cow defeats the purpose. The utilisation of the **young ones to sniff out the prey will no longer be the purpose** but they shall **teach their young ones to lie down together.**

There comes a time whereby new beginnings are necessary, the winds of change blow wherever they will, the sins of one generation cannot be carried over to the next. There comes a time when there shall be a new chapter. Otherwise exile is eminent. I have a dream my Methodist family.

So, if we have to go forward there has to be a new chapter, the new generation must be different from the old generation. Take for example, in South Africa we have a growing new generation that is slowly phasing out the old generation of those who were the oppressed and oppressors in the apartheid regime. Blacks and white are dating, living together and even worshipping together. The kingdom is slowly but surely uniting.

Isaiah in the text is actually saying the kingdom must unite. I have a dream.

I have a dream that the kingdom will be united, if not with the older generation then their young ones shall lie down together and enjoy the land of plenty, sharing resources and responsibilities equally. Barriers will be broken. I have a dream. I have the dream that the glaring economic inequalities that are echoed by the #FeesMustFall will be no more. The young ones from both the rich and poor, black and whites household shall lie down together and equally have access to education.

These are our children. I have a dream of organisations who prioritise the educations of their young ones.

The cow and the bear must lie together and the church cannot remain silent in this conversation of fees, vandalism of property and the language debate at school. In **the manyano reports on Wednesday I can see the dream beginning to become a reality through the bursaries.**

There will be no harm or hurt in God's holy mountain

In the light of the context of Isaiah which include: Divided kingdom, spiritual emergency, economic disparities. Isaiah becomes a dreamer and he says in verse 9: **“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”**

This holy mountain of the Lord refers not only to the Church but to the entire world. After all the psalmist says, **“The earth is the lords' and all its fullness.”** A world where all barriers have fallen and a world in which all people are outward looking hence mission focused will indeed be Gods holy mountain. There will **be no harm or hurt on his mountain that She created for worship.**

The end of hurt and destruction in the holy mountain is only possible when **together** we work towards

transformation and the breaking of barriers. I believe that as a Wesleyan people we are those who are after a church and a world where there is no hurt. Isaiah then brings us into concluding that on God's holy mountain, we shall work together as a transforming discipleship movement to break down barriers.

We are motivated by Wesley himself to work towards a time when there is no hurt or harm. This motivation is presented in what has come to be known as the Methodist rule of life. Wesley states, “Do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.”

Bishop Rueben Job, Bishop of the United Methodist Church

1. **“To do no harm means that I will be on guard** so that all my actions and even my silence will not add injury to another of God's children or to any part of God's creation.” Note this, silence does a lot of damage. Remember the words of Martin Luther King, Junior, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”. I have a dream.

2. **“My desire to do good is a response to god’s invitation to follow Jesus and it is in my control, I can determine to extend hospitality and goodness to all I meet.”**
3. **“We find our moral direction, our wisdom, our courage, our strength to live faithfully from the one who authored us, called us, sustains us and sends us into the world as witnesses who daily practice the way of living with Jesus.”**

My fellow Methodist, it is imperative especially in our time to **“Do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.”**

Conclusion

We have dreamt with Isaiah. We have found our times very similar to his times, we have looked at some of the imagery he uses in the text and derived powerful lessons from the world of animal on top to bottom transformation and bottom to top transformation, our aim has been to see all harm and hurt eradicated from the holy mountain of the Lord. This connexion is the Lord’s holy mountain.

We have had a glimpse of what could be.

It's time to wake up.

Prophetic imagination does not end with dreams, unimplemented resolutions, policies and ideas but calls for implementation.

We have a dream.... How do we make a dream reality? I leave that to you presiding Bishop and conference.

Hear the words of Isaiah 11verse 6-9 with some paraphrasing:

6. The wolf must live with the lamb, the leopard must lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child must lead them.

7. The cow needs to feed with the bear, their young have to lie down together and the lion needs to eat straw like the ox.

8. The infant has already played near the cobra's den, and the young child has put her hand into a vipers' nest.

9. There must be neither harm nor destroy on all Gods' holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

My fellow Methodists, I thank you.