Intergenerational Worship

Bible Reading - Isaiah 11:1-10
Year A – Advent 2 Dec 4 2016

What is this: Intergenerational Bible Reading

Where it’s used: In any intergenerational gathering, but specifically Lectionary based gatherings.

Time: 10 minutes

Bible Focus/theme: Isaiah 11:1-10

What’s needed:

• Large poster or screen displaying Art work for Isaiah 11:1-10 by Chris Booth
• Optional video clip of anthropomorphic animal interaction.
• Collection of Farm and Zoo animals. Try to include some Australian animals. Prepare assortments of these in containers to distribute amongst your gathering. Make sure you have at least enough for one per person with some left over.

*During the introduction pre-arrange some helpers to distribute the plastic animals

In many times and places, story tellers and poets and teachers and prophets and philosophers have used animals as characters to help their communities think about things in new and challenging and wise ways.

Some of our best stories for helping us think about how to be human, are filled with animals.

I wonder if you can think of some...

• Take suggestions from your gathering.
• If you think your gathering may be slow to volunteer ideas, perhaps provide some examples:
  The three little pigs
  Animal farm
  Finding Nemo
  Chicken Run
  The hare and the tortoise
  Charlotte’s Webb

A short video clip may be useful to kick start this.

The Bible does this too – our Bible Reading today is a great example.
In the reading there are some interesting combinations of animals making friends. You have all been given or have chosen a plastic animal. Let’s see what happens when we put some of these animals together.

Turn to the person next to you and imagine if your two animals were to live together in a paddock, or a zoo enclosure. How would that go? Could they get along? Would they both be safe? Would they both have something good to eat?

- Allow time for this, then get some feedback. You might want to make a list of some of the outcomes on a whiteboard or flip chart.

The animal combinations that we’ve got here are just random.

The animal combinations in our reading from Isaiah are not at all random.

Let’s read these animal combinations from Isaiah together.

- Optional: if you have the kind of personalities in your gathering who would enjoy this, invite a couple of people to improvise the animal noises associated with each of the animals in the passage. A basic growl/roar, a generic bleat/moo and the hiss of the snake should cover everything, so it could be achieved with just 3 volunteers (or those you have worded up before hand.)

Who spotted some tricky combinations?
What were some of the animals that you think maybe shouldn’t be put together?

- Take suggestions.

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

11:7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

11:8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

11:9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

11:10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.
So we’ve established that all of these pairs of animals would end up with some serious trouble in this situation. So what do we think this part of Isaiah is suggesting? I can think of two possibilities. Maybe you’re thinking of them too.

One is that Isaiah’s vision of the future is one of danger and risk, and possible violence.

The other is that Isaiah is writing of a time when things that used to be dangerous will become safe.

A time when things that we think are attackers, predators won’t attack, but be peaceful.

Melbourne Artist Chris Booth has created a picture of this. The Cow and the Bear at the moment are fighting – but love and peace is on the horizon for them.

What do you think? Remember how we said that stories about animals are often really about people. What do you think of that?

- Allow a pause for reflection and any response that emerges.

There is a second way of understanding this picture of odd combinations of animals. Among the ancient Jews, and remembering that it is their story we are listening in on, there were rules about which animals were to be eaten and which weren’t.

These animals were called ‘clean’ (to be eaten) and ‘unclean’ (not to be eaten).
These food rules were just for the Jews, as the people in nations around them ate plenty of the ‘unclean’ animals. So the different animals here can be divided into clean and unclean, or perhaps representing ‘Jews’ and ‘other nations’.

Let’s look at the food rules and see which animals are in which category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clean</th>
<th>Unclean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☀Hoofs, chews cud</td>
<td>☀Divided feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☀Fins and Scales</td>
<td>☀Toes/paws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☀wings + more than 4 legs or that leap (insects)</td>
<td>☀Hunts/scavengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀Doesn’t chew cud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀Crawls on it’s belly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀Wings + 4 legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀Birds of prey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀swims but no fins or scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☀swarms (air, land, sea)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Display a list of the clean and unclean animals from Leviticus 11.
- Invite the gathering to listen to verses 6-10 read again very slowly and to identify which list (clean or unclean) the animals are from.

What did you notice about the pairs of animals that are keeping company?

- Invite and affirm observations

We notice that our bear and our cow come from different lists – one is Jewish food the other is not. The same for the wolf (unclean) and the lamb (clean).

So here is a picture not just of safety among those who we know as predators and prey, but of friendship between cultures that are different and repulsive to each other.

As we remember that the prophet Isaiah, like many other poets and story tellers through time, is using the animals to show us something about humans, about ourselves.

I wonder what you think this picture of the future calls us to do today?