

The Lion and the Lamb

ISAIAH 11:1-9 (NRSV)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
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.
⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
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.
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.

In central Africa, beginning about the time reflected in our text from Isaiah (around 700 BC) Bantu tribes migrated into the now known as Rwanda. The most prominent were the Hutu and the Tutsi (the Tutsi likely from Cush—what is now Ethiopia. In Hebrew Scripture Moses' wife was from Cush.)

Those migrations were slow and steady, integrating and assimilating rather than conquering the existing cultures. Over the centuries, the Hutu and Tutsi established distinct, different cultures—the Tutsi herded cattle, the Hutu farmed the land. And like some of the range wars romanticized by American western movies, those two cultures frequently have difficulty co-existing.

The animosity between cattle herders and the farmers grew over the centuries, with occasional skirmishes fueling a general hostility, much like we see

between Democrats and Republicans in our own culture. Nobody remembers how the bitterness began; they just fight because they're Republicans and Democrats, and that's what Republicans and Democrats do.

In Rwanda, the Tutsi dominated until World War I, Belgium took control and imposed colonial rule. The Belgians modernized the economy, which further favored the Tutsi and disenfranchised the Hutu.

But then, Christian missionaries got involved and saw it as their calling to empower the underprivileged Hutu. They created a strong Hutu clergy and educated elite, which provided a new counterbalance to the established political order.

By the middle of the 20th century, the fortunes were reversed, with the Tutsi disenfranchised, and the vested Hutus initiating an ethnic purge of the Tutsi. Tutsi fled the country en masse. In 1990, a rebel militia of Tutsi, commanded by Paul Kagame invaded north Rwanda, and began a full-scale civil war.

In retaliation, in 1994, between April 7 and July 15—100 days—Hutu militia slaughtered more than one million Tutsi citizens—an event now known as the Rwanda Genocide.

In 1999, I read *The Angels Have Left Us*, by Hugh McCullum. He conducted hundreds of interviews with people directly affected by the Rwanda genocide—survivors, NATO officers, church leaders, government officials, etc.

About a month ago, Julie Richardson, Disciple colleague and a favorite blogger whom I often quote, wrote of her response to McCullum's book: "...I'll tell you, if you're going to talk about God's love, if you're going to voice anything about what God can do or who God is, you sure better not say anything that you could not say to someone who survived those 100 days in Rwanda!"

She shared about a video series called, "This is football." For us NFL fans, that's "soccer." The first episode is called "Redemption." Through some incredible stories of survival, it explores the redemptive power of sport, not only for individuals, but for entire countries and communities, as well.

The first episode is told through a club of fanatical Liverpool fans called ...wait for it... the 'Rwandan Reds'. At first glance they mirror fans from around the world. But all are survivors of the Rwanda Genocide, and behind their smiles are tormented stories of pain and loss, and how they found a dream and a community again in football.

Three men are at the center of the episode: all of them lost family; and when they talk about those 100 days, they stop to gather their thoughts, gazing off in the distance, naming their memories with choked voices.

And all three gather with their fellow Rwanda Reds, at the bar or on the

pitch, whenever it is possible to do so. Because they are avid Liverpool fans.

It's an incredible story—three men who survived the worst of humanity and moved on to have families and careers, to smile again, to play again.

But there's more: in 2004 the Rwanda national football team qualified for the Africa Cup of Nations for the first time ever. A big deal! Only a decade past the genocide, this tiny country had overcome such tremendous tragedy to walk onto the championship pitch. Present for the qualifying match was the President of Rwanda... wait for it... Paul Kagame, and, quoting Julie: "the footage of his joy is enough to make even the Grinch turn soft, y'all, I swear."

But, here's the thing (and Julie's primary point): *On that team were both Hutus and Tutsis...*

- ... *both perpetrators and survivors.*
- ... *players who had macheted their way through entire villages where family and friends of other players lived.*
- ... *men who just ten years before were sworn, mortal enemies.*
- ...*now on the same team.*

The same is true still, when the Rwandan Reds gather in that Liverpool bar to watch their beloved "Wasps," or gather on the pitch to take on a local team.

Hutu and Tutsi. Both. Murderers and victims. Both.

I teared up just reading Julie's blog. How could those men, in only ten years, find their way through such terrifying events, to a place on the other side where they're able to say, "We are not Hutu or Tutsi here. We are Liverpool."

These men in this episode spoke of pain, grief, hate, evil. They spoke of hiding and running and seeing their family murdered. They spoke of how none of it made sense and of its confusion and horror.

And they spoke of forgiveness. Of a grace that can't be explained. Of the way their common love for football has transcended literally all else and left them nothing short of family to one another.

It's miracle. All of it. Simply miracle. And it makes our partisan political squabbles seem so petty.

May God forgive us; and grant us clarity of vision and purpose in which...

⁶The 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. And Hutu and Tutsi will play football together.