



SERMON RECAP

AUGUST 16, 2026

The Prophet of Imagination: Don Quixote from “Man of La Mancha”

Isaiah 11:1-9

Using source material that was nearly 400 years old, *Man of La Mancha* actually subverted the message of Miguel Cervante's famous work, *Don Quixote*. Written in 1605 - and what many consider to be the first novel - *Don Quixote* is a criticism of attitudes that were considered antiquated. Quixote was a buffoon, an old man who dressed up as a knight and fought imaginary monsters. It was a scathing critique of outdated ideas of chivalry in a crumbling Spanish Empire.

Cervantes spun a tale of a man who was duped by too many bad romantic stories, had a self-inflated ego, and did more harm than good in an effort to defend empty values. The book was a satire on medieval systems of honor and the emptiness of the culture.

Man of La Mancha, however, takes a different read on the man who fought windmills. *Man of La Mancha* is a play within a play. The musical begins with Miguel Cervantes being arrested by the Spanish Inquisition (this never happened and writer Dale Wasserman never claimed to be creating a historic representation of Cervantes's life). The story then shifts to a prison, where Cervantes is put on a mock trial by his fellow inmates.

They accuse him of being a bad poet and he pleads guilty. They mock Cervantes for telling stories and spinning tales and say that he should stick to reality. Cervantes's defense then takes the form of him play-acting Don Quixote. The bulk of the musical is a play within the play. As Cervantes tells the story, he tells of Quixote's death. He is forced to look in a mirror and see that he is not a great knight. He goes into a coma and believes his “Don Quixote” persona was a mistake and he dies a wrecked man. This was the original ending to the novel *Don Quixote*.

It is the prisoners demand a better ending. So *Man of La Mancha* gives us an alternate ending. Here, Quixote is able to rise once more, reclaim his values, and die an honorable death. The musical transforms Quixote into a heroic figure whose ideals of integrity and justice are worth dying for and can transform lives.

The song “Impossible Dream (The Quest)” has become one of the great standards in the American song book. It is an inspiring ballad about fighting the good fight against impossible odds. When some would mock and



“Man of La Mancha,” with book by Dale Wasserman, music by Mitch Leigh, and lyrics by Joe Darion, premiered in 1965 and won five Tony Awards — including Best Musical and Best Score. Inspired by Miguel de Cervantes’ 1605 novel Don Quixote, the show has become a landmark of American musical theatre.

scoff at Quixote for believing in the impossible dream, we are inspired to believe that one man can, in fact, change things. Cervantes's story transforms the beleaguered prisoners and gives them something to live for.

Some would call Isaiah an impossible dream. The historical setting of Isaiah is close to hopeless. Judah is beset on all sides by powerful forces that will surely spell their doom. But Isaiah makes the impossible claim that peace is not just possible - but promised.

Isaiah expresses an impossible dream of predator and prey coexisting. He shares a dream of righteousness being the rule, not favoritism; that wisdom will be strength, and knowledge of God's way will be the path to glory. The violent will be defeated - not by swords - but from words. The instruction of God (John later called it the Word) will lead to peace.

Isaiah's dream was as impossible then as it is now. He was a prophet to a King who was clinging to past glory and did not trust that God could redeem them. But Isaiah had the prophetic imagination to trust in something that seemed impossible.

Cervantes may have been right to expose the hollowness of old systems of honor. Much in our world still deserves that kind of critique. But *Man of La Mancha* insists that integrity, justice, and compassion are not relics of a naïve past—they are the seeds of God's future. Quixote's imagination changes a prison. Isaiah's imagination changes a nation. And our imagination, shaped by the Word of God, can change the world we actually live in. The wolf and the lamb are not yet lying down together, but every act of courage, every refusal to surrender to cynicism, every choice to see dignity where others see nothing—these are the first notes of that impossible dream becoming real.

NEXT WEEK:

The Prophet of Courage: Elphaba from “Wicked”