

The Second Sunday in Advent

Text: Isaiah 11:1-10

Theme: The Root of Jesus that Is Still Bearing Fruit today

In the last number of years we have lost a lot of trees in Wisconsin. There was a time when our boulevards were lined with elm trees. There were 128,000 of them in Milwaukee in the 1950's. By the late 60's they were almost all gone due to the Dutch Elm Disease. When I came to Benediction, I tried to grow a garden behind the education building, but the evergreens were so thick, that the plants received hardly any sun. Now they are all diseased and looking sick. In 1969 our church planted about 40 ash trees, including a nice ash grove. In the last year, almost all of those trees have succumbed to the emerald ash bore. Our November voters' meeting had to spend \$17,000 to cut them down. All of the ash trees will eventually be gone. At home, I tried to grow a new tree from a shoot from one of the roots of an ash tree that I cut down, but that died too.

Israel has a lot of olive tree, especially near Jerusalem. Nothing seems to be able to kill those trees. Many of them are hundreds of years old. You can even cut them down, and a new shoot will come up.

That is the example that Isaiah gives of the Savior. It would look like the line of Jesse had become a stump, but a new shoot, the Savior, would come from that stump, and He is still bearing fruit today.

I. In the Old Testament God's people often seemed to be nothing more than a stump.

It often seemed like everything was over for God's people, but God always preserved a small remnant. In the book of Genesis man's wickedness had come to great that every thought of his heart was only evil all the time. God was grieved that He made man, but there was one man who found favor in the eyes of the Lord. God saved Noah and his family from the great flood that God sent on the earth. As time passed the whole world fell into idolatry. They worshiped gods that they had made rather than the creator of the earth, but God called a man named Abraham from the gods of his ancestors and promised that all nations of the earth would be blessed through Him. God built the descendants of Abraham into a great nation, but they became slaves in Egypt. He redeemed them from their slavery and brought them to the promised land. Things seemed to be different when they prospered under Kings David and Solomon. But then the tree of Jesse was cut down. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel broke off and started their own country. The northern tribes began to worship the Baals, the gods of the Canaanites. By the time of Elijah, he was afraid that he was the only prophet left, and there were only 7,000 people who had not fallen into Baal worship. Those 10 northern tribes were completely destroyed in 722 BC by the Assyrians. Then in 587 the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people who remained into exile. A Jewish king from the house of David would never rule from Jerusalem again. It would seem like the tree of Jesse was cut down once and for all. But again God preserved a remnant. After 70 years, 40,000 people returned from exile to the promised land. Israel was always like the stump of an olive tree. They were cut down again and again. It would look like all was lost, but a remnant would always remain, until...

II. The root of the stump of Jesse would come.

Jesus is the shoot that would come from the stump of Jesse in verse 1. He is the Root of Jesse to whom the people of the nations would rally in verse 10. He was born of the house and line of David in Bethlehem. When He was baptized, the Spirit came upon Him and He began His ministry. He was filled with wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He went through the towns and villages of Israel doing good, healing, calling sinners to repentance, and preaching the good news that God's kingdom had come. Isaiah has an extended section in our text of how he would judge with righteousness. Think of the times when he revealed many hearts. He revealed the hypocrisy in the hearts of the Pharisees. He comforted those who mourned. He stood up for those who were mistreated. He even promised heaven to a criminal who repented of His sins on the cross. He was able to look directly through the masks that people were wearing, right into their hearts. He will especially judge with righteousness when He returns to judge the world on the last day.

Then Isaiah writes what will characterize His rule – righteousness, faithfulness and peace. He writes that righteousness will be His belt. None of the kings of Israel were perfectly righteous. Even the good kings like David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah had their faults and their moments of weakness. But Jesus is righteous. He was good and perfect throughout His entire life. He was so compassionate that He gave His righteous life on the cross for the payment of our sins. For a moment, it seemed like the stump of Jesse had been cut down for the last time, but He rose from the dead in victory as our Savior. Isaiah writes that His sash will be faithfulness. This is His promise that He is with us until the end of the age, and that at that He will return as he promised to take us home to be with Him forever. He will never leave us or forsake us. We can always count on Him and His grace and mercy for us. Finally, His rule is characterized by peace. *“The wolf will lie down with the lamb...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.”* This peace is never easy in this world. However, the early church was able to bring together Jews and Gentiles into one church. The Gospel has spread to all kinds of different people throughout the world. We might be very different, but we all worship the same Savior, and we even call each other brothers and sisters in Christ. There are times when we struggle to live in the unity and peace that God has given to us in this world, but the day when Christ returns, people of every nation, tribe and language will gather around His throne to live in the eternal peace that He will give to us in the new Jerusalem.

This is the most important part of Jesus' reign. Isaiah writes, *“The nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious.”* Sometimes we make the mistake of believing that the remnant theology of the Old Testament still applies today. It no longer does. Yes, the devil tries as hard as he can to destroy the church through false teaching, persecution and the apathy of Christians, but despite the threats the church continues to grow and spread throughout the world. Even when the Gospel is rejected in one place, it is received with joy someplace else. Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” It does exactly that when we share the Gospel and support missions. God's Word does not return empty. It is God's power to bring many to faith that Jesus Christ is their Savior.

In the Old Testament God's church was always hanging on by a thread. Over and over again it looked like the line of Jesse was just a stump. But a shoot has grown from the stump of Jesse. The Savior has come. He has redeemed us from our sins. He promises that He will always be there for us, and He has made us a part of the greatest fellowship there is in the peace of His church.

May God make us a part of those who rally to Him, and that the fruit that He bears will be the peace and glory that we will share with Him and all of His people. Amen.

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