

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of the world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. All mankind will see God's salvation. Alleluia! (Luke 3:4, 6)

Sermon Text: Isaiah 11:1-10

Certain events in life strike you with a momentous truth: Life is going to change. At that moment you recognize what you once had is never going to return.

You saw that play out on September 11, 2001. People woke up without any fear of terror. National leaders worked away on normal, everyday affairs. Thousands of Americans streamed to their secure jobs. Suddenly, in just a matter of hours, peace, comfort, and security came crashing down.

Can you envision the looks on people's faces as they realized what was happening? Tears streaming. Eyes searching for answers. Mouths gaping wide open at the thought that commercial airline jets were just used as weapons. If you looked into those eyes, you knew this catastrophe

Isaiah 11:1-10

- 1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—
- 3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling^a 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 hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.
- 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.
- 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

would change life entirely. The peace and safety you once had was never going to return.

Maybe September 11th wasn't the last time you experienced that sinking despair. When you laid a loved one to rest, you realized how you were laying a cherished relationship to rest. Perhaps one-too-many arguments leaves you wondering if your family can ever reunite. You shake your head as society's morals quickly erode away. You felt comfort, security, certain clarity in familiarity. Where do you discover comfort, security, and clarity when life changes?

Isaiah points you to Someone who has made life better and will continue to make life better. Don't overlook it! **BEHOLD! A BRANCH IS GROWING!** *from a lowly stump. It grows to stand as a rally-point for all people.*

Why the talk about a "branch" and a "stump?" Well, when you cut a towering tree down to a stump that is all that's left: a dead, lifeless stump. No hope that it will re-sprout into tree. No thought of it producing leaves, seeds, and fruit ever again. A stump leaves behind an irreversible, permanent death. That is coming to the nation of Judah: the sight of an irreversible, permanent death.

But it wasn't always that way. Judah was once a flourishing tree! Victorious war-king David gobbled up land and pushed Judah's borders to its greatest limits. David's son, king Solomon, wisely navigated through foreign relations. Trade flourished. The economy boomed. Citizens felt safe. If you feel secure living under strong leadership and a vibrant economy now, then you can just imagine the comfort so many had during this golden era. Most of all, tucked in this glorious nation is God's guarantee: *the house of [David] will endure forever* ([2 Samuel 7:16](#)).

You see, the very moment sin ripped into the world— and all of its hurt and pain, fear and confusion, anger and frustration gushed after it— God held out a little Seed. He promised this little Seed would *crush the serpent's head* ([Genesis 3:15](#)); this Seed will grow to tower over the effects of sin! Then God planted that little Seed. He watered it with the promise: *The scepter will not depart from Judah* ([Genesis 49:10](#)). King David reigned over Judah and then his son after him and then the next son and the next and so on. This family tree flourished! Still God's promise goes deeper than an earthly king; God is promising that Jesus will come through David's family tree.

Yet, stand in Isaiah's life. David's line of strong, mighty kings has rotted away to corrupt, godless government officials. The gleaming, polished-white walls of the temple once called out as a center for worship. Now, the one true God had been pushed into the temple storage room —and little gods to the sun and stars and rain and war had been set up. Courtrooms that once granted justice to the oppressed would only do so if they were bribed. For years Isaiah called people to turn back to God, to hear his Word, and to apply this truth to their hearts, but they rejected him.

If Judah rejected God, then God would cut them down. No palace. No government. The temple will be dismantled piece-by-piece and scrapped. Homes lie in heaps of burning rubble. Merchant tents are tattered and torn. Fields scorched. Life once lived so effortlessly suddenly screeches to a halt. Most of all, David's line stretching towards Christmas Day is suddenly cut off.

Can you imagine how deflated people felt? This is one of those momentous life-events. You recognize how God stood with you through leaders, through earthly blessings, and the promise of an eternal home. In a matter of minutes, you recognize life is going to change. If David's line is cut down, then does that mean Jesus is no longer coming?

You know how the story ends. Isaiah prophesies: **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.** For 600 years the grayish wood of a dried, cracked up, and rotten stump remained a grim reminder of what Judah once held, but had since lost. Yet, suddenly— off the side of that stump shot a little shoot, a little sprout reaching up from

a manger in Bethlehem, the home city of ancient King David. This baby's father, Joseph is not only related to David, but David's father— Jesse. On that Christmas night, Joseph, [14x-great] grandson of Jesse, looks at the Heir to David's throne. In case you have any doubt that Jesus is the One to expect, then look at this child's baptism. God the Father booms: *"This is my Son; I am pleased with him"* and *the Spirit of God descending like a dove* and rested on Jesus—just like Isaiah said would happen! ([Matthew 3:16](#); [Isaiah 11:2](#))

You see it! **A BRANCH IS GROWING!** *from a lowly stump*— just as God promised. Centuries after King David's name is last mentioned comes the whisper of a new name: "King Jesus."

The **BRANCH THAT IS GROWING** rises from a stump. It grows taller and broader. It flourishes. It towers. It *stands as a rally-point for all people!*

Is that what you see in Jesus? Someone to rally to? Or does Jesus look about as powerful as a dead, lifeless stump?

You heard the statistics before: Nationwide, across every single church denomination, one out of every three Americans born between 1981 and 1996 claim to have no religious affiliation (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/>). Maybe you notice that people over the age of 35 tend to make up the majority of your congregation— and not just your congregation, but congregations in every denomination all across America (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>). It just appears that no one wants to listen to the Word of God anymore— or, that people only seek a message that sounds pleasing to the ears.

Maybe you wish the morals from years ago still existed today. Instead, you hear "wrong" behaviors called "right" and you hear "right" beliefs now called "wrong."

It appears the buzzword: "cancer" is heard more than ever before. You grow frustrated when it feels that prayer after prayer for healing just is not answered the way you want answered. It just feels that God has cut away his promise from you— and the God we follow can do nothing!

And that would be exactly what the devil wants us to believe. He loves to point at that stump and say: "Behold! Your God! Dead! Lifeless! Powerless! Unable to have his Word dwell in society! Unable to heal you! Unable to answer you!" If he can just get you to see your God as powerless and weak, then he can drive you into despair— despair that God is useless, despair that God is failing you! That despair can drive us away from our God.

Yet, remember which side of Isaiah's prophecy you live on. You do not see a stump. You **BEHOLD A BRANCH GROWING!** It arrives on Christmas Day! Now you see a Branch *standing as a rally-point for all people!*

The Spirit of the LORD [has rested] on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding— and in Jesus you understand God's mercy. Even though needless despair tugs our hearts away from our God, your God graciously sends forth a saving Branch.

[T]he Spirit of counsel and of power guides Jesus through every earthly temptation. Jesus visits the sick and knows his Father in heaven answers their prayers. Jesus preaches; crowds find his message irrelevant— but still Jesus clings to a powerful, life-saving truth. You can be sure that Jesus saw events in this life which could drive him to despair that his Father has everything under control. When those temptations came, he turned to the Word for counsel and power.

Your Righteous Branch **fears the LORD**— that is, he respects and obeys his Father's wishes. He carries out his Father's saving plan to its fullest limits— even when the plan has him for people who doubt his powerful ability to act. God cuts Jesus off from the land of the living because we despair of his power to act. Yet, this Branch wears **righteousness as his belt** and he puts his righteousness over our despair.

Death does not cut down this Branch. Rather, he rises from death, rises into the heavens, and powerfully exists as King of all! **BEHOLD! A BRANCH IS GROWING!** *He stands as a rally-point for all people!*

That's why you are here. Someone opened the Word and showed you the peace that comes through Jesus. Wolves live with lambs. Leopards rest next to goats. Calves and lions are together; children play near viper holes. Predators don't hunt; prey is not eaten. Enemies of humans don't bite and poison; humans do not run away from danger. This describes the perfection you now wear. You stand at peace with God. No longer does God the righteous Judge turn against you in fiery anger. Rather, he looks at you through Jesus and sees your sins removed. *Rally* around this flourishing Branch!

Where do you rally? Well, at a place where the Word of God is shared. That's what makes this congregation so special. This building calls out for people to come and hear the things God has done! And yes, sometimes we may grow saddened by who is not here. It's so easy to mourn: "Well, remember the number of kids we once had? ... or the number of seats packed? ... or how young we once were? (Even though the only way we grow is older). We can easily fall into this mindset of despair and defeat— as though we have nothing to offer.

I know for a fact that is not true. As a congregation, you have something to offer. That is not me trying to share hopeful dreams or unfounded inspiration. You have something to offer because Isaiah says so. **In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.** How do you think Jesus "stands as a banner today?" Well, how do people hear that God sent his one and only Son into the world so that those who trust in him as their Savior will have eternal life? ([John 3:16](#)) Where do you hear of a God whose mercy touches broken lives and homes? Where do people learn the only answer to death is found in the empty tomb of Jesus? Yes, people can purchase Bibles and read it. More likely, many will gather in a place where the Word is used! What makes this congregation special is not the age of people in it or the amount of programs in it, but rather the fact you get to see Jesus.

This Word leads you to rally around the towering Branch! The One who has entered heaven has opened heaven for our loved ones! The One who gives us peace with God is the One who gives us forgiving words so that we re-establish peace with angry family members. The One who lived in a society with lowered morality is the One who gives us his Commands to shape our lives. You discover comfort, security, and clarity in this towering banner!

Isaiah points you to Someone who has made life better and will continue to make life better. Don't overlook it! **BEHOLD! A BRANCH IS GROWING!** *from a lowly stump.* It grows *to stand as a rally-point for all people.*