



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

After all that has happened this year, from hurricanes and politics to domestic shootings and terrorist threats, it is good, I think, that the church gives us the season of Advent to focus on hope...hope for me and you, hope for our nation, hope for our world. Because if there is anything we can learn from this crazy year, it is that we so desperately need hope.

Isaiah knew all about crazy times, the death of an admired king, the corruption of a nation, rumors of war. The words of the book of Isaiah cover a lot of history. Israel falls to Assyria, Judah to Babylon. Jerusalem, the Holy Mountain, is sacked, the temple is destroyed, and the Jews are exiled. It doesn't get much worse than that. What hope is there for a people so sin sick and suffering? Enter Isaiah. He sees a day when a righteous king will rise up from Jesse's stump, after the manner of David, a king filled with God's spirit, who has good, practical common sense, one who is fair, especially with those who have little. He envisions a ruler who can protect his people, who knows how to engage smartly with other nations, and who reveres the Lord. He is a righteous king, a strong and wise king, a godly king.

Centuries later, in God's good time, a king did appear. He was not quite the king Isaiah had in mind. Still, there were those who saw in him the fulfillment of all the words of hope Isaiah put to writing for his people. The disciples saw a blessed hope for all nations, a hope for all peoples, a hope for all time. That hope is Jesus.

— Rev. Dr. Van Dickens, Retired Clergy-in-Residence

Consider the Source Isaiah 11:1-9

A Family Affair

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, also the first Sunday of the Christian year! Advent means *coming* and during the four Sundays in Advent, Christians prepare for the birth, or coming, of the Christ child. Preparing for the birth of Jesus is exciting! What do you do to prepare your homes for the coming of Christmas? Do you decorate a tree or bake special cookies or other treats? How can you prepare your hearts for the coming of the Christ child, as you do your home? A few suggestions for keeping Christ at the center of the season might be to have a family devotion each day, or to light an advent wreath in your home.

The advent candle that was lit during the service today stands for hope. For Christians, hope is defined as confident expectancy. It is not wishful thinking but a firm assurance about things that are unseen and still in the future. Christians have hope because they have received God's gift of Christ living in their heart.

Dear God, thank you for your presence as we look forward, with hope, to celebrating the birth of Jesus. Be with us as we prepare our hearts for this gift and help us to be a light to share the gift with others this season. In Jesus name, Amen.

— Jennifer Hall, Director of Children's Ministry

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 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. Isaiah 11:1-2

Monday: Isaiah 11:1

Recently, I cut down a small sapling that was growing where there was not enough light for it to grow properly. I cut it down to the ground. No more tree, right? Wrong. Two weeks later, I looked at the stump, only to see shoots growing all around it. That's one stubborn tree!

- What examples of stubborn hope are you aware of? The birth of a nation? The end of a war? The fall of the Berlin Wall? Isaiah saw a day of rebirth where there was once just a stump.
- In what ways do you long for new shoots to grow in your life? In your neighborhood? Our state, nation and world? Impossible? I know of one who rose from death itself. That's hope!

Tuesday: Isaiah 11:2

- "The spirit of wisdom and understanding..." Do we who follow Christ treat people who are down and out, in crisis, or who have ruined their lives, the way we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes?
- "The spirit of counsel and might..." Do we who follow Christ truly strive to live in peace with our neighbors? How do we practice diplomacy in our neighborhood, church, and world? How do we ensure the protection of those entrusted to us, both spiritually and practically?
- "The spirit of knowledge & fear of the Lord..." Do we who follow Christ show reverence for God in what we say, think & do?

Wednesday: Isaiah 11:3-5

Isaiah doesn't imply that a righteous ruler should close eyes and ears. Rather, a righteous ruler sees and understands the deeper truths than what appears on the surface.

- Jesus saw beneath the guilt, the sin, and beneath the condemnation others had for sinners. He saw all the way through to the soul, and then reached out with truth and mercy. Do we?
- Jesus also spoke truth to power, even when it was risky. Are we willing to speak the truth, even if it risks a loss in status? Our job? Our friends? What does it mean to be righteous in the face of evil?

Thursday: Isaiah 11:6-8

The prophet foresees a day when animals get along with each other, when the norms of predator versus prey are set aside. Ours is a rather cutthroat world, a survival of the fittest mentality. The kingdom of God is a very different reality.

- In what ways should we practice kingdom living with those who would be our enemy? In our business dealings? With other nations competing for the same interests?
- How do we make peace with the competition? (yes, even among Baptists and Methodists)

Friday: Isaiah 11:9

A day will come, says Isaiah, when all the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, not just a basic understanding, but a deep reverence for God, total, and complete.

- How do you suppose that will come about? Through Jesus? Yes, indeed. Through those Jesus calls to go forth and spread the word? You bet.
- And how does God spread the knowledge of our loving savior? Through missionaries, yes. New churches, yes. Through our inviting people to the church? Yes. Through our personal witness? Yes. As Wesley would say, to as many as possible, as often as possible, in as many ways as possible, for as long as possible, trusting that God will make of our efforts what only God can do. Spread the word this holy Advent season. Tell them of the one who came and who is to come!