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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 4, 2016
2nd Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12
Hymns: 55; 72; 645; 73:5 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 11:1-10

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD,
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
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 slay the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.

10 “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: A Dead Stump

The familiar picture in our text is something we have all probably seen at one time or another. A tree has been cut down and before you know it there are new shoots coming up from that stump. Most of the time those shoots that grow out of the stumps aren't strong shoots, but more like weak whips, not destined ever to grow into a strong tree. Of course this only happens when that stump is fresh. When the stump is old and rotten we wouldn't expect anything to grow from it again.

Now why did the Lord cause Isaiah to use this picture? Isaiah was predominantly a prophet of doom. He was a prophet declaring the judgment which was to befall the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as well as many surrounding powerful kingdoms who had despised the Lord and conducted themselves in great wickedness. In the chapter preceding our text the Lord declared that He would cut down the high and mighty trees; that is the kingdoms that appeared so strong to the world that they were thought of as nearly invincible. Just as we read the words of John the Baptist in our gospel lesson, “even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees” (Matthew 3:10), so in Isaiah's day the ax of God's judgment would chop those nations and their kings down to size, leaving only stumps, stumps that would never grow into powerful trees ever again.

This judgment of God included Judah, but then in the words of our text God changes the picture in a significant way for Judah. A shoot would grow up from that dead stump of the Davidic dynasty. For centuries the line of David would be weak. Joseph was of the lineage of David, and what was he but a humble tradesman who built things for people! There was no mighty warrior, no great king, but that characterization would suddenly change as Isaiah prophesies of --

THEME: A Glorious Branch Growing From a Dead Stump.

This prophecy of the coming of Christ reveals Jesus --

I. Possessing the True Qualities of Greatness.

Now we have to understand greatness from the Lord's perspective and not from human terms. While Isaiah lived the great kings of the world were mighty conquerors because they were cunning and ruthless, and so greatly feared. They led great armies into battle, and when they overran a nation they didn't hesitate when it came to crushing their enemies. Indeed they often took great pleasure in inflicting pain and torment on the people they attacked, often breaking their spirit. And that was how they built empires, and acquired fame and riches and glory for themselves.

Isaiah speaks of the qualities that would be possessed by this Branch growing out of the roots of Jesse's house. He doesn't mention ruthlessness or cunning, or heartless torments. He speaks of how --

Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

These aren't the qualities found in the rulers of this world, but they were the qualities found in Jesus, that glorious Branch that rose up out of the dead stump. The Spirit of the Lord that rested upon Jesus and remained on Him was the Spirit of God's redeeming grace. The Lord is our covenant God who desires all men to be saved. This is the heart of Christ. Jesus possesses wisdom from on High and the understanding not only of human nature, but of the heart of

God. Possessing these qualities Jesus was able to teach the people the truth of God that brings salvation. Jesus taught them as One having authority, not as the scribes, who taught merely human opinion. So we see that Isaiah foretold that a very different Spirit would possess Jesus' heart than was found in the hearts of His enemies. He possessed the wisdom of God.

What is that wisdom? Paul writes of it in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. God's wisdom is the wisdom of the cross. Yes, that wisdom which on its very face is so obviously foolishness to the world, for how could one Man sacrificing Himself, subjecting Himself to the torments of crucifixion bring honor and glory and victory? It is obvious to any thinking man that crucifixion is utter defeat! But it is God's wisdom for our salvation, for Christ would pay the **propitiating price for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.** (1 John 2:1-2). Jesus not only understood this as the principal of our salvation, but this filled His heart as He loved us, and gave Himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the foundation of a truly great King that would rise from the stump of the house of Jesse, the line of David.

Among a King's duties was serving as judge for the people. This Branch that would rise up out the roots of Jesse was the One who would be --

II. Judging with Righteousness.

Our text tells us:

Isaiah 11:5 "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 slay the wicked."

Yes, a good judge needs to be fair and impartial. A good judge will seek to serve justice. According to the ways of this world that would mean that each shall be judged as they individually deserve to be judged. The guilty shall be condemned. The innocent shall be acquitted and set free. Perhaps a judge in this world will strive also

to be merciful, as long as mercy doesn't undermine justice and the rule of law within society. So it can be a rather difficult thing to be a wise and impartial, and a merciful, and just judge.

We are told that it is perfect righteousness that will determine Jesus' judging. Does that cause one to tremble? After all, the Lord knows all things. He knows all that we have done. He knows that even the best of our deeds are soiled by sin, and no better than filthy rags. He knows the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. What chance can we have before the Lord, the righteous Judge? After all, Jesus Himself describes how He shall come and judge on that last Day. We read Jesus' own words in John's gospel:

John 5:28-29 "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹ and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

What comfort can we find in knowing that this Branch that would rise from the root of Jesse will judge with righteousness? Our text tells us that "**with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked!**"

We do find comfort for He does not judge us according to our righteousness but according to the righteousness of God, that righteousness which is credited to us through faith in Jesus' merits. By laying hold of the cross by faith we deny any righteous deeds of our own, and the Lord credits us with the righteousness which is by faith. As the Judge looks upon those who are thus poor in spirit He will decide with "**equity for the meek of the earth.**" Their transgressions will not be paid for twice, for the Savior already paid the full price for their sins. We will be found righteous on a different basis than the law.

Paul writes of this judging in his epistle to the Romans:

Romans 3: 21-26 "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified

freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time **His** righteousness, that **He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

In his first epistle John spells it out for us short and oh so sweet:

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful **and just** to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Ultimately this brings us to the goal of Jesus’ reign:

III. Bringing Peace for All the World.

Isaiah goes to nature to depict how seemingly unnatural this wondrous peace shall be that comes to us through the Branch growing up from the root of Jesse.

Isaiah 11: 6-9 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.
9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.”

The prophet uses a series of pictures that sound absolutely astounding to us because they are so foreign from what we know in this world. In this world the wolf rips open the lamb’s throat, and the leopard tears the young goat to pieces. We don’t see the lion lying down with the ox, or the child safely playing with the cobra in the vipers den. We might be tempted to think that what Isaiah wrote is craziness, not ever to be found not ever to be found.

For the mind of man that is exactly how foreign true peace with God is. And yet that is exactly what the Branch brings into the world. Perfect harmony, perfect peace in all God's creation. Indeed peace with God that surpasses all understanding, for how can there be peace when the carnal mind is enmity against God? It comes only by the Spirit working through the gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ, the Branch that grew up from the root of Jesse.

Does this include you? Does this surreal picture of peace and harmony envelope me as well? Our question finds its answer in the last verse of our text:

Isaiah 11:10 “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.”

In that day, our text declares, the day when these things shall come to pass. We know that day as the day Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the angels appeared to shepherds. They had good tidings of great joy to share with them for a Savior was born in the city of David. The Root of Jesse had indeed arrived, and He is the Prince Peace. Now how do we come to trust in Jesus as our Savior? When our text declares that He stands as a banner for the people it is like the regiment colors being raised on the battle field. It is a rallying point for all the soldiers and they rush to the regimental colors. So Jesus is being raised by the Lord to be that rallying point for the people. All should be drawn to Him for peace. It is at this point that the Lord expands the picture to include us as well. It is not only for the Jew, or the children of Israel, but also for the Gentile that Jesus has come. As the Lord's signal for peace the Root of Jesse shall also cause Gentiles to seek Him, and in Him find their resting place. Jesus brings us peace. He brings US peace!

Ephesians 2:12-13 “We were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus *we* who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

The Rod from the stem of Jesse, the Branch that grew from the root of Jesse, Christ Jesus our Lord, has brought us hope. He is our great and Glorious King who brings us the wisdom of God for our salvation, and in whom we are justified. Peace on earth good will toward men!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.