

## Christ the King

Narrative Lectionary Year 2, Week 11

November 22, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings Mark 12: 1-3; Isaiah 5: 1-7; 11: 1-9

*Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen*

What kind of sign is a tree stump? The tree has been chopped down. There's hardly anything left. It's just the tree's roots are too deep and stubborn to surrender the space. What kind of a sign is a stump? You might be able to sit on the stump for a rest if the bugs haven't already laid claim to it. You could count the rings in the stump to estimate how long the tree grew before it was cut. What kind of promise is a stump? A stump IS what the people of Northern and Southern Kingdoms were becoming at this point in the Bible narrative. They had been diminished from their heights during the reigns of King David and Solomon. They were Divided. The Northern Kingdom would be conquered by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom would hold on a little longer but about 587 B.C. it will be defeated by the Babylonians and dragged into exile. The chosen people of God have become like a "decaying stump" — the stump of David's father, Jesse — a stump of rulers and a people who abused, ignored and defied their covenant with God — a stump seemingly at its end.<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Isaiah proclaims that in God's hand the dead stump is not the end. It's not an illustration of hopelessness "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse," God declares. Seems a stretch, don't you think? Dead is dead, isn't it? "Surely," God says, "you have seen "something growing where nothing should." <sup>2</sup> It took blasting and forceful machines to break up solid rock for highways and tunnels. Yet, who hasn't seen a sapling or tiny plant growing out of rock or the side of a mountain or in the desert sands or some other seemingly impossible place. A branch shall grow out of the stump of Jesse, God promises. Dare the people of God hope?

The sprout from this particular stump will be a new leader, "one who will delight in the Lord," who will rule according to God's sense of righteousness and remain faithful to the Lord's ways of power and love. This king will care for the poor, protect the downtrodden and dispose of injustice. What will result is a kingdom where "all of creation is celebrated and integrated and intertwined in mutual interdependence . . . It is a vision of a world where those who are distant and different from us become our friends — not an either/or world, [not an us/them world] — but a both/and world ---- a peaceable kingdom where the wolf can live with the lamb, where the leopard can lie down with the kid, ----

where the weak and the vulnerable are granted authority”<sup>3</sup> and there are no longer oppressors and oppressed or haves and have nots.

Many years later, we followers of Christ will read this prophecy in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah and believe they are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Today we celebrate Christ as our King, the bearer of God’s love, forgiveness and peace. Today we celebrate that Christ is our King, the ruler of our lives, the church and eternity. Yet in all honesty, today we may also be thinking of the evil unleashed in Paris and Mali and wondering about the power of domestic and foreign terrorists to cultivate a politics of fear that tears at the seams of neighbors, communities and nations. If Christ is King, if Jesus’ life and ministry, death and resurrection embodied the peaceable kingdom of God, why isn’t that global community of justice and harmony near completion?<sup>4</sup> If we aren’t asking that question, then surely those who don’t know Jesus are.

Some might say we are naive or wishful thinkers. “But,” as preacher Susan Andrews says, “that is the point of hope. Hope is living in between vision and reality. It is living “as if” in the “not yetness” of God’ promise. Hope is trusting that what was inaugurated in Bethlehem will be completed in God’s good time. Hope is claiming our small part in this global vision — realizing that we don’t create the vision or complete the vision, but we are privileged to participate within it,” to be God’s partners in making God’s kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Did you recognize this verse from Isaiah? : “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” (Is. 11: 2) Your first thought may be about Jesus standing in the Jordan being baptized, when the heavens open, a dove descends and God proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1: 11) But that spirit of the Lord came upon YOU, also, at your baptism. A pastor laid hands on your head, praying words like:

“Sustain this child with the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding , the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.” (ELW p. 231)

These are not just nice words on a special day. That Spirit of the Lord is no passive bird in the sky. The Spirit of God comes to dwell in us at baptism. The Spirit of God is about the work of converting bitter grapes to good grapes, changing us to be more and more like our king, Jesus. And by transforming us, the Lord continues the work of Jesus to transform the

world to be one where is no more hurt or destruction but rather justice and right relationships. We come here each week to hear God's Word, receive our King's very self in communion, to stay rooted in God's goodness and ways. We pray, worship, read Scripture and participate in a Christian community to invite the Holy Spirit to continue to transform us, to grow us into the baptized children of God we are. For it is God's plan that we become shoots that grow out of stumps, so that we may bring God's hope and life where others only see despair and dead ends.

We know God's transformation is working whenever disciples of Jesus, include the marginalized and welcome the stranger, raise up those who have been beaten down and seek justice for all who have been treated inhumanely, when we strive for an equity where the hungry and needy have enough and the rich and powerful do not have too much,<sup>5</sup> when we seek to bring God's love, respect and will into all parts of our lives and world. Those are the hallmarks of our King and the Kingdom announced in Isaiah and begun in Christ our King. When we witness kindness and active compassion between people, we are seeing a glimpse of Christ the King's kingdom. When we discover the beauty of the stars and the wonder of love after a long siege of grief or pain, we are witnessing the kingdom of God breaking into our world. When we look past labels and differences to authentically care about the well being of another, the fullness of God's promises is revealed.

Next week we enter into the season of Advent, preparing for the coming of our Lord at Christmas, for the coming of our Lord at the end of earthly time and in our daily lives. If you yearn for the peace that passes all understanding . . . if you long for the world in which the wolf shall lie with the lamb and the lion and calf share a meal, then choose to intentionally open yourself up to the transforming Spirit of God. Read a daily devotion, worship regularly, be courageously generous to those in need, do Advent acts of kindness and pray to be changed, pray to be more and more like our King, Jesus. Let us seek to be Spirit-shaped disciples of Christ the King, "choosing hope in God's promises over despair . . . choosing God's vision"<sup>6</sup> over the world's brokenness, NOT because we are naive but because we are God's shoots growing out of stumps, bringing God's kingdom to life. May it be so. Make it be so, Lord. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 11/21/15

#### ENDNOTES

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1. Susan R. Andrews, "Stumps and Wolves - Preaching the Text" as posted on goodpreacher.com
  2. Barbara Lundblad, "Commentary on Isaiah 11: 1-10" as posted on working preacher.com

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3. Susan R. Andrews, "Stumps and Wolves - Preaching the Text" as posted on goodpreacher.com
  4. Susan R. Andrews, "Stumps and Wolves - Preaching the Text" as posted on goodpreacher.com
  5. Paraphrasing of portions of Kevin Ruffcorn's sermon posted on the Narrative Lectionary Facebook page
  6. Paraphrasing of Susan R. Andrews, "Stumps and Wolves - Preaching the Text" as posted on goodpreacher.com