

ISAIAH 11:1-10 LED BY A CHILD

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. Jesse is the father of King David. A stump can be large, and in an inconvenient spot. It can be rotting and ugly. Some people use them as stands for nice things, or even carve nice things into them, but eventually left alone that stump will rot, decay and disappear. But sometimes a shoot can come from a stump. Sometimes they're annoying shoots, like the ones I had at my last place. The stump was cut right to the ground and shoots kept coming up from it, and I kept mowing them down with the lawn mower.

Shoots from a stump are not only annoying, but they're also fragile, and easily mowed over. Now the shoot in our reading is a child, and children are also fragile and easily hurt. This is the beginning of our reading, telling people about help coming to them from a child.

The monarchy of Israel had not worked out, and like a great big tree they had been cut down and taken away in pieces to exile in Assyria. Any effort to return home must have felt like shoots springing up from a stump only to be mowed down again and again. How could this message bring them any hope? Read one verse past our text.

“In that day the Lord will extend His hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of His people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.” (Isaiah 11:11).

The firewood of this cut down kingdom had been scattered near and far, but before it was all burned up a remnant of the people would be gathered and recovered by God Himself, and not by the efforts of the people. And God did finally bring them back after about seventy years of exile in Babylon. They were brought back to rebuild the kingdom in Judah.

As we read this text we too can feel like those scattered people of Israel, like fragile shoots, like fragile Christian churches that are easily mowed down and closed, and we too may wonder how there can be any hope found in these words from God. These words point to a shoot, not the many fragile shoots of Israel, or the many fragile shoots of Christians today, but to a shoot, coming from the stump of Jesse. Coming from that cut down, burned and rotten stump of the family line of Jesse and David comes one shoot to bring us hope, one child.

It was a humble entrance for God to come into our world as a fragile child. All the promises of God were hanging on this one child. Herod tried to mow Him down shortly after He was born, but He escaped the scythe as God

moved Him to Egypt, one of those places which God said He would bring His people back from. Hosea 11:1 says, “When Israel was a child, I loved Him, and out of Egypt I called My Son.” This child, this Son whom God refers to is not only the nation of Israel being called out of slavery in Egypt, but also Jesus as the Gospel of Matthew (2:15) makes clear. So, the shoot being referred to here is Jesus, and that should make it a lot clearer as to where our hope comes from in this passage. It comes from Jesus.

Jesus would come as a shoot, as a child. He would come by the miracle of a virgin birth and He would come from the dead stump of the royal line of David. This small green shoot wouldn’t be cut down, not yet at least. He would mature to a branch, or a hardened tree with branches that would bear fruit. We’ll come back to that fruit later, but for now let’s watch this child grow up.

The Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him. When does the Spirit of the Lord come to rest upon Jesus? The Spirit of the Lord comes to rest upon Jesus at His baptism, which comes right after our Gospel reading. “When Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him.” (Matthew 3:16).

This Spirit of the Lord comes with many gifts to Jesus, three pairs of gifts. As I read it I could see that the last leads to the first. Maybe you too are familiar with the saying that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It comes from the book of Proverbs, as well as other places in the Bible. Yet when I went to look up that saying it in fact says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge and understanding – Proverbs 9:10. That leaves two things on our list that we’ll also come back to. However, I also found this connection in the book of Isaiah itself.

Isaiah 33:6 also talks of Jesus saying that “He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure.” About twenty chapters past our text Isaiah says that the fear of the Lord leads to a treasure which is knowledge, wisdom and salvation that is found in Jesus. This shoot, this child, will grow up and have the Holy Spirit rest upon you so that He can give you salvation.

The second pair of gifts that Jesus receives from the Holy Spirit that I didn’t find any connection to the fear of the Lord are counsel and might. Do your Christmas ears ring when you hear those two in connection with Jesus? Mine did. Isaiah 9:6 says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God”.

Receiving this gift of the Spirit of Counsel means that Jesus knows what His people need. He gives us good advice from His Holy Word, and He tells us of His plan for our salvation. The Spirit of Might means that He has the power to carry out God's plan for our salvation.

Are you starting to see how our hope can come from this tender shoot of a child, how Jesus can bring you hope? It may not feel like that to you as I make all these nice connections from the Bible. At times your life can feel absolutely ripped apart as were the lives of those Israelites in exile. Our country, our church, your family can feel torn apart. When whatever it is that's falling apart or even rotting in your life, when everything seems to be going wrong and there's nothing to hold onto, know that God is holding onto you by this little child.

Portions of your life can feel like nothing is going to come from it. Yet God doesn't only work in the perfect times of your life. Your life can be like that rotting stump at times, and you can feel like giving up, but wait a year or two and suddenly something beautiful can blossom. Just because your past is a mess, or your life is presently falling apart, don't assume that it's beyond the hope of our God. Our God isn't that weak.

This shoot that comes from what appears to be an all but a dead tree isn't a dead tree itself, but rather it bears fruit. The prophecy of this text isn't only pointing to the birth and baptism of Jesus, but also to His return and judgement day. Now, all those images of judgement and heaven are a whole other sermon. The image I want to leave with you for your hope is that of the resurrection. To see the resurrection think again of that dead stump coming back to life, and then it bears fruit.

Fruit is an image in the Bible of the resurrection. Fruit is an image of you. In the book of Romans it says that if the root is holy, so are the branches and so are those who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, which we receive in our baptisms. And we the firstfruits groan now and eagerly await our adoption and the redemption of our bodies (8:23, 11:16). According to Romans we are the firstfruits of Jesus now, and according to First Corinthians we will be the firstfruits of Jesus in the resurrection to come. Jesus first and us to follow. "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

This is the hope of our reading. To the Israelites – The Messiah is coming to save you. To us – Christ Jesus has come to save you. And to all the nations now – Christ Jesus will come again to bring about the resurrection of our bodies to heaven, God's Holy Mountain, and that resting place for us will be glorious. As we approach Christmas we can get sentimental and say that a little child shall lead us, but as mature Christians we know that child to be Jesus our Saviour. Amen.