

Isaiah 11:1-10

Second Sunday in Advent (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

It Isn't Over Until It's Over

December 8, 2019

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And 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 the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Former Yankee catcher and manager Yogi Berra has long been considered a master of wit. One of my favourite comments by Berra comes from his days as a catcher, when a batter came up to the plate, took the bat and made the sign of the cross over the plate. Berra stood up, patted the man on the back and said, Hey, why don't we just let God watch this one? But the most famous quip by Berra is one that came when he was commenting on the outcome of the National League pennant race. Asked by sportscasters what was going to happen in the coming games, Berra simply made the observation, “It ain't over till it's over.”

As far as I can tell, Yogi Berra and the prophet Isaiah have nothing in common, but they both seemed to understand that one simple truth: It isn't over until it's over. There may be times when things look pretty bleak. There may be times when we can't see any solution to the troubles and uncertainties of our lives. There may be times when we are absolutely sure that there is no way out of the mess we are in. But it isn't over until it's over. As long as our God is with us, there is hope—and hope, God tells us through His Word, doesn't disappoint us. In the Righteous Branch that comes up from the stump of Jesse, God gives us a sure, a certain and a living hope as He brings salvation and deliverance to His beloved children.

I like this text from Isaiah. This text speaks of a glorious day, the day of the Messiah, who is referred to in this text as the Branch of Jesse. In His day, righteousness and justice will be the norm. More than that, the wonderful serenity of the garden of Eden will again be restored. There will be perfect peace, not only between men, but between men and animals, and among the animals themselves. ***They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea,*** Isaiah said. This is one of the glimpses of heaven in Scripture; a beautiful scene of the best of times. It's exactly the hope we need in the midst of our crazy lives, the hope that things are truly going to be better.

It was also the hope the people of Judah needed for their lives. To understand just how much they needed this hope, we need to know the rest of Isaiah's message to the people. God has sent Isaiah to warn the people of the consequences of their sins. They have been unfaithful to the Lord. They have rebelled against Him. God will not let sin go unpunished and unchallenged. In fact, God is going to cut off His people, levelling them as a forester levels trees. Nothing will be left but stumps in the land.

It would be many years before the kingdom of Judah would fall to the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. But when that time came, Jerusalem was conquered, and the people of Judah were taken as captives to Babylon. The

wonderful city of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah since the reign of king David, was destroyed. The beautiful temple built by Solomon was also razed. The whole kingdom was gone, the kingdom God had promised to David and his descendants forever. All the glory of Judah had been destroyed. All that was left seemed to be a lifeless stump.

But, as Isaiah reminds the people, it isn't over until it's over. Things sure didn't look very good! The people were going to be captives in a foreign land. It was hard to imagine how things could get much worse, and their didn't seem to be a whole lot of hope that they would get better, either. But God's promise through Isaiah is that He wasn't done with the people yet. There is still hope. The captivity itself would only last 70 years. God would then raise up Cyrus who would free the people and let them return to rebuild Jerusalem. But Isaiah had an even greater message of hope for the people: ***“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”*** If the people longed for the glory days of King David, then they should know this: the best was yet to come. God would bring life out of this lifeless stump. In David's greatest Son, the promised King of Kings, God would bring the greatest deliverance of all, and His people would enjoy a time of glory that even David could only dream about.

When it comes right down to it, we're probably not concerned about those nations and kingdoms of so long ago. What matters to us is our lives today, and the things that are going on all around us. Maybe things are all going well, and we are content with our lives just the way they are. But more often than not, things are never as smooth or as ideal as we would like them to be. How can they be, when the sins of our lives and the sin that fills our world still brings its consequences, judgement and pain? There may be no hurt or harm in the kingdom of God, but there is more than enough of it in this world. There are more than enough moments when things just seem to be falling apart on us. The coming days of Christmas are a time of gladness and celebration for us as God's people—and yet for many, they are the saddest days of the year. We have quite a few families who have lost loved ones, who are going to have to face a Christmas that is different because of those family members who won't be coming home for Christmas anymore. Some of those deaths were very hard and unexpected. Maybe we or someone we love will have to spend the holiday in the hospital. Some may have had great plans for the coming days that all had to be changed, because circumstances have changed. How many are feeling the stress of the changing economy, with its lay-offs and salary reductions? Money is tight, and that means we're also struggling as a church. Add the busyness and the often unrealistic expectations we have in this season of the year, and we see extra stress between parents and children, between husbands and wives. We want to think our lives are going to be idyllic, but there are times when suddenly everything seems to be crashing around us. We wonder, just how bad can things get? When is all this lousy stuff in our lives going to come to an end? We've had all we can handle. We feel so hopeless.

But as Isaiah said, it isn't over until it's over. Things were bad for the sinful people of Judah—but God hadn't forgotten them. They thought they had lost everything—but God still had a plan for their rescue. More than that, He had a plan for their salvation. He has that plan for us, too! God deals with the very root problem of all the troubles of this world. He does that through the Righteous Branch that comes from the stump of Jesse. We know that Branch to be Jesus Christ, the One Isaiah calls Emmanuel, which means, “God with us.” In Christ, God Himself comes to a world dying in sin, a world falling apart because of that sin, and He turns all things around. Through Christ, sin can't drag us down to hell, because His death on the cross brings forgiveness to all who trust in Him and who turn to Him for that forgiveness and life. In Christ, death loses its power and we live, because He is risen from the dead. Pain, illness, disappointment—all the troubles and griefs of this world become exactly that, troubles of *this* world.

This is our hope: in Christ, we are looking forward to a better world, the world that Isaiah described so beautifully: a world where true righteousness and justice are the norm; a world where the wolf and the lamb live in peace and harmony; a world where pain and sorrow and financial burdens and every other trouble of this world have faded away forever. No matter how dark the day may seem, our God is with us and working for our good, so brighter days are coming. We still have every reason for hope, because we have a Saviour who has given His own life to bring us to eternal life in heaven. There are no circumstances in life—or in death for that matter—which are hopeless, impossible or beyond the reach of His help. There may be those times when it seems that things are at their worst, but no matter how dark it may seem, don't lose hope because we know it's not over yet. Our God is with us. His mighty power is at work, and will be at work for our salvation. He will deliver us in His grace. And we know ***his resting place shall be glorious.*** Amen.

