

The Branch From Jesse

- 11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- ² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together;
and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
- ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the
nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Crying Out: "Give Us a Leader!"

December 20, 2020 AM
Advent series on Isaiah

Isaiah 40:1-10
Rev. Richard J. deLange

Dear people of God,

I was watching a recent Clint Eastwood movie. He's getting old but still a great actor. In "The Mule" he plays a guy who has spent his whole life neglecting his family. He's been a terrible husband and father and even a not-so-good grandfather. Life has mostly been about himself. He loved getting recognition for growing beautiful flowers so he spent lots of time doing that. He had no trouble spending time in the coffee shop or the bar with his friends but he could almost never find time to be with his family, not even when they really needed him. If you consider the husband and father to be the head of the home, he was a terrible leader. More times than the family could count, he left them crying. Crying out for a better leader.

Maybe that's your story too. Maybe that describes your home life in some way. Maybe that's your cry at work. Maybe that's your cry on your team. Maybe it's how you feel about our world today, maybe you cry for better federal or provincial governments. Maybe even better healthcare leaders.

We all can probably think of someone we were once led by that we just didn't appreciate. I remember a music teacher who once got mad at me... because I was being a perfect angel, of course. Not! I really don't remember what I did wrong but I'm sure I was guilty because I know I hated music class. For whatever I did, the teacher came over and punched me in the stomach. Now, to be clear, even 45 or 50 years ago, that wasn't okay. And he quickly realized it. So at the end of the class, he nervously prayed for me, as if to cover up his wrongdoing. Needless to say, he didn't rank too high on my good leader scale as a kid. But I don't even remember the guy's name anymore. On the other hand, I can remember my grade school principal. When I got sent to the office—because that's where they send you when you do good things—he would patiently ask questions to get to the bottom of the situation. He would wisely determine that I was in fact guilty. Then he'd invite me to hold up my hand while he hit it with the strap. That might not be an approved discipline method today; it might have had its shortcomings back then too. But, to me, this man was a good leader because you actually felt like he really cared about you. He wasn't power-tripping on his ego; instead, he was trying to help students reach their potential by being full contributors to a healthy society. That man was highly respected by almost everyone but, undoubtedly some would disagree because they likely had a different experience of him.

When it comes to politics, it seems people are almost always crying out for better leaders in our society. Politicians can have a 70% approval rating in the first few months of a mandate but, almost without fail, when something goes wrong, people turn on them. People gossip and spit vitriol: he said he'd change things for the better but everything is worse. You can't trust her as far as you can throw her. They are all self-serving crooks. Or worse! And my sense is that people feel that way all over the world, regardless of the political system they have. In some places they might be less free to speak up than other places but the sentiments are very similar: Politicians seek power and, when they get it, they use that power to advance themselves.

From time to time—too often really—we hear about Christian leaders who abuse their power. But the people who trust these leaders bear some blame as well for exalting the leader too highly. We forget the wisdom of old: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Instead, we allow certain leaders to wield power without accountability. Then we are somehow surprised when that power is abused. The pastor is the only one driving a Rolls Royce but he says that's what God wants for him and for everyone else, if they'll just believe in God the way he does. We've heard of too many pastors falling into sexually immoral behaviour because they have power that makes them feel like they are able to take whatever they want. Pastors are like everyone else. We cannot handle absolute power because our sinful nature also urges us to think of ourselves first.

Remember how King David took Bathsheba from her husband Uriah and even had him killed? By all accounts, David was a good king but he did have plenty of moral failures. Some glaring failures. However, over the course of several generations, David's line of kings grew worse and worse. Some were plain and simply wicked and made their great grandfather David look almost faultless.

It seems the heart of people is so bent to self-service and self-advancement that, when we get power, we just can't keep from doing what seems right in our own eyes. I'm sure that each king—no matter how wicked—thought he was doing a good job. He was advancing his kingdom, maybe conquering other lands, building alliances with all kinds of kingdoms to reduce the threat to his own kingdom. But those alliances were built on faith compromises. They were good for the king and his personal security but they involved intermarriage of his family with the pagans that led to idolatry for the nation. Never were these political moves about righteousness and justice for the poor and alien in the land.

The interesting thing about Isaiah's prophecies in this book is that God is displeased with the leaders of Babylon and Assyria but he's perhaps even more displeased with his own people Israel and Judah because their leaders have God's law to guide them. They should know how to live and rule righteously but they turn out to be even worse than the pagan neighbours who God sends to conquer them. God continues to rebuke his own people—the leaders in particular—for self-service rather than looking out for the weak and the poor and seeking a kingdom of justice and righteousness for all. Read Isaiah 58, for example, where God basically says to his people, "You fast one day a week but then you rip off the poor and needy. You do religious things just to promote yourself. Do you think that's the kind of righteous life I'm looking for?" Of course not!

And this is where Isaiah points us to Jesus. Israel and Judah are all be decimated. The tree is chopped down. Only a stump remains. People would say that tree is done. This nation of God's people is erased. But, no, says the Lord. I'm not done with this people because I'm not done with the world. I'm not ready to forsake my world even though people keep taking advantage of one another, trampling on the weak and poor as just one example of that.

The truth is, one person, one community, one nation might have more wealth and power than another. One person, one community, one nation might have more prestige than another. One person, one community, one nation might be more highly educated than another. One person, one community, one nation might have more money than another. But do they love one another? Is that a virtue they esteem? Do they desire to know God and to live their lives for his glory, loving him above all and their neighbours as themselves?

As much as God holds that standard for just and righteous leadership, all the nations come up lacking. But God so loved this broken, unjust and unrighteous world... the world that included Israel and Judah, the world of Assyria and Babylon, the world of Rome and Greece later on, and our world today. God so loves our

world today—you and me and our neighbours—that he sent us from that Jesse-stump a new sprout that ultimately points to Jesus.

Look at this plant. Once upon a time it was beautiful and filled with lush green leaves. But something went wrong. All the leaves dropped off. It looked as good as dead. We probably should have thrown it out. But then we saw fresh little sprouts coming out of that old stock. Isaiah pictures a tree in much worse condition than this plant. It has actually been broken off. It has not shown life for centuries.

Then an angel from God appears to Mary and later to Joseph and says to these humble descendants of King David,

Mt 1:21b “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

O friends, God provides a shoot from the line of David because every other shoot from that line has been in some way, shape or form a failure. Each one of them—and of us—needs to be saved from our sin! And that can't happen unless God comes to us himself. Immanuel is the fresh, sinless shoot that comes out of the stump of Jesse, from the line of David to bring us salvation from our sin. Salvation from our self-seeking ways.

This is the leader we all need. This is the answer to the cry “Give us a leader” that people throughout history have been lifting up to God. This is the answer to the cries of the oppressed and the oppressor, the proud, the arrogant and the meek and the humble, the weak and the strong. This is the answer we didn't even realize we were crying out for because we are so self-absorbed.

If you think about it, the cry for better leaders sometimes says as much about the people crying out as it does about the leaders themselves. We are imperfect people judging imperfect people for doing an imperfect job. Every single leader in our world is always imperfect. We look for people to lead us who simple are not up to the job. We expect from people what only God himself can provide us in Jesus, our Messiah.

Do you realize that every single kingdom in our world has ended or undoubtedly will at some point. We can't put too much faith or hope in human leaders and kingdoms. The Book of Daniel has a great picture in Daniel's vision. Daniel sees 4 kingdoms crushed by one giant rock which also represents Jesus and the all-powerful, never-ending Kingdom of God. The end of Isaiah 10 tells us,

*Is 10:33 See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty,
will lop off the boughs with great power.
The lofty trees will be felled,
the tall ones will be brought low.*

*³⁴ He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax;
Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One.*

Then chapter 11 starts with the promise of a fresh shoot. The promise of salvation from sin through Jesus.

He loves and serves as no king ever has. He serves by coming down, stooping to our level from the glories of heaven, in order to redeem us, lift us up, free us from our self-seeking ways. He redeems us by his love and grace.

He provides justice and righteousness to us and for us.

He empowers us with the Holy Spirit so that we can now seek to live like him, seek to lead like him—in our homes, in our workplaces, in the halls of government and justice, in our hospitals and, of course, in our churches. We don't use our power for self-advancement. We use it to advance the kingdom of God where justice and righteousness for all is exalted.

We don't have to put our hope in human kingdoms. I don't mean that we don't have to work within them. We do. We must. But our heart is on God's kingdom, seeking righteousness and justice for all peoples. Wanting all peoples to bend the knee before Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords in order to live the new life he has redeemed us to live. In order to live a life free from selfish-ruling. A life of loving service which blesses others and soothes their cries for help until Christ comes again. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

MORNING WORSHIP

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 20, 2020, 10:00 AM

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP

Welcome

Opening Prayer

Call to Worship

God's Greeting

Advent Candle Reading: *Love*

James Hofstede

Gathering Songs:

Hofstede family

O Come All Ye Unfaithful

What Child is This?

LUYH 95

GOD GIVES US HIS WORD

Children's Message

Pastor Hilary

Children's Song: *Away in a Manger*

LUYH 86

Prayer for the Word

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Pastor Rich

Sermon: ***Crying Out: Give Us a Leader***

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Song: *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

LUYH 80

Tithes & Offerings

1. Trinity Ministries (Budget)

2. Wycliffe Bible Translators

Confessing our Sin & Receiving God's Pardon: LS Prep

Congregational Prayer

Song: *Emmanuel Hallowed Manger Ground*

GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH

God's Parting Blessing

Sending Song: *For Unto Us a Child is Born*