

A miracle green shoot will grow

Bible reference for sermon - Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,

and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,

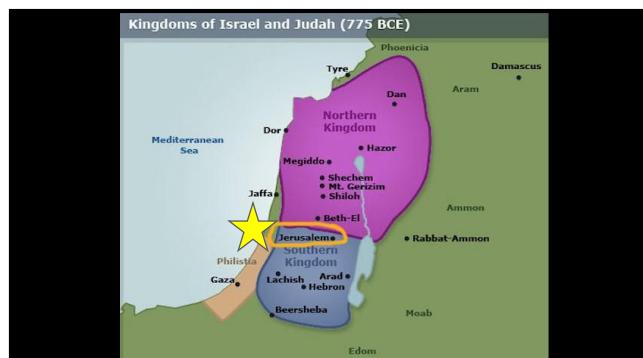
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,

the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 1:1 tells us that Isaiah was prophet to Judah and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom) during the reign of 4 kings of Judah, placing him as prophet for approximately 40 years from 740 - 700 BC. During this time Judah and Jerusalem has been under great threat from the mighty Assyrian empire. In 721 the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians



It would only be by the merciful intervention of God himself that Judah was spared the fate of Israel in the north.

But Isaiah's prophetic words were to stand. The kings and the people of Judah and Jerusalem were also judged by their faithfulness or more accurately their lack of faith to God.

Eventually the southern kingdom, the city of Jerusalem and even the temple would be destroyed and God's people taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 587 BC

The tall trees of Judah and Jerusalem would indeed be cut down and the lofty brought low. The dead stump of despair was all that seemed left.

And yet, another word comes from the very same prophet:

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse . . ."

God through Isaiah already lifts the eyes and ears and hearts of the people in an amazing word of hope in the coming of the one God. Who would send to rescue and

bring new life. “A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse” from the line of Jesse and so from King David a king would come somehow out of the hopelessness of the seemingly dead stump a green shoot would emerge.



In Central Australia, my first place as a pastor, I was often amazed at where things would grow. For me this pic tells a story of growth where it shouldn't be possible:

- a) The tree growing out of rock but also
- b) The new growth from the side of the seemingly dead tree growing out of the rock.

Also, when it rains in Central Australia life itself seems to rise up in the form of plants and insects and creatures out of the parched dry land.

Central Australia was my first parish 30 years ago. Not only was there amazing growth possible in the physical land but also amazing spirituality among particularly the indigenous people there, which sometimes showed amazing new growth in the face of despair. There was a period of devastation during my ministry when a number of young indigenous people tragically took their own lives. Grief among the people was very audible and visible.

Where had God gone?

The funeral for a 16-year-old girl stays with me to this day. There was such an outpouring of grief that I feared the community would break just as the hearts of her family had.

The dead stump of despair again was there in the desert. But the community lived and it was by the love of faithful indigenous leaders from our congregation... leaders who called the community together, who found and made a safe place for young people who struggled with substance abuse and whose families were devastated by it. Those brave Christian leaders said enough! We must be who we are and created a safe and structured place people could go and they partnered with our congregation, their spiritual home to connect people without hope with Christ and community in their church.

It was one of those times in life when I knew that with God all things are possible and where I saw love to life, Like a seedling pushing through rock toward the sunlight.

To me it was a miracle made possible by God in the faith lives of just a few faithful Christian leaders in the community.

What a difference courageous faith can make! What a difference love that takes risk is!

And what of us as community and individuals here?

It's not that long ago, I reflected recently on my call, since I arrived here and the congregation was in the midst of turmoil. Was that dead stump of despair at St Paul's? There was conflict and hurt followed soon by COVID which affected the plans for building anew here at Riversdale Road.



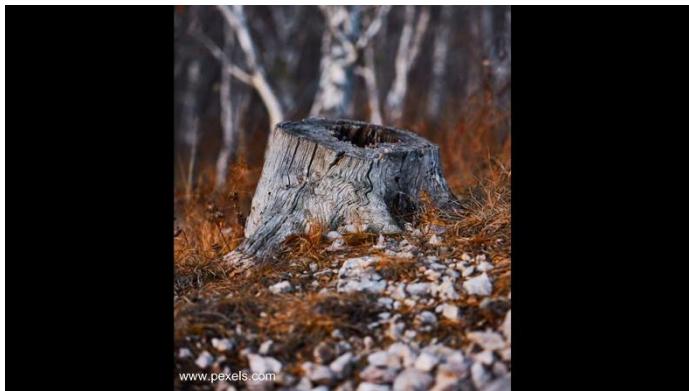
We came here with such hope only to be met by COVID 19. Would we ever make it through. And yet bit by bit our church was refurbished and dedicated with just a handful of us present... And finally, the new building started.

The shoot grew and here we are today. And it's not just in the

physical building, is it?. In faith we have grown through this as God has been faithful in the gospel forming his people anew. We're now well and truly in a place to look outward well beyond our own navels.

How about for you this Advent? How is God's green shoot of faith in Christ growing in you? For God surely plants in you and me the gift of life. How are you tending to this gift of life for you? What might God be calling you to this Advent and Christmas to be his green shoot of life and hope in the people God gives to be around you?

How are we called as the body of Christ now to be a green shoot for the community around us and for people who have lost contact with Jesus and his church? For a wider church finding its way. For people without hope. For people who are lonely or addicted to things which will eventually kill them or cut them off from people they love. How are we called today to be a green shoot for people whose hearts have been ripped open by grief and who have lost hope. For people who face utter despair?



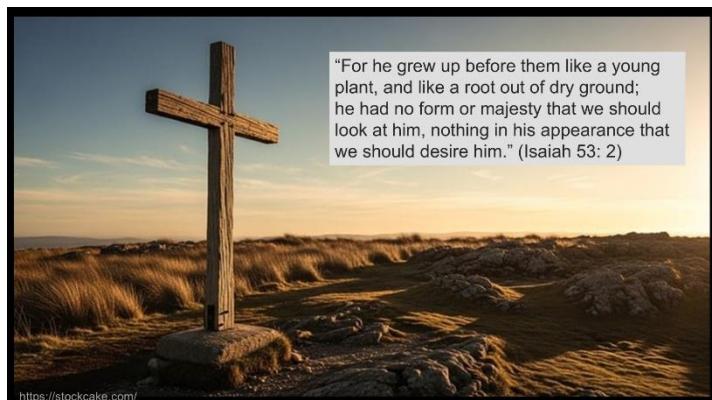
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“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse...” I’ve known the dead stump of despair myself in the utter despair of death of people I’ve loved, perhaps you have, too. And I feel it regularly now. You may be there now too — at that place where hope is cut off, where loss and despair have deadened your heart.

God’s Advent word comes to sit with us where we are. This word will not ask us to get up and dance because everything is right and always good. The prophet’s vision is surprising, but small. The nation would never rise again. The shoot would not become a mighty cedar of a nation. The shoot that was growing would be different from what the people expected:

As the same prophet would write later of the one who was despised.

“For he grew up before them like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53: 2)



This is what Isaiah would write of the Messiah later in one of four songs of the messiah not as a mighty warrior king but of a selfless SUFFERING SERVANT who gave his life that all who despair may know love, forgiveness and life. Isaiah is already pointing us this Advent to the coming of the One who went the way of the cross where it seemed that the stump of death and despair was all there was. But death would not be the final word and as we look forward again to celebrating the birth of God among us, so we in our very human journeys of joy and pain, hope and despair, life and death, look to this babe born into humble beginnings in the desert for the shoot of life for us and all people.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse... fragile yet tenacious and courageous. It would grow like a plant out of dry ground. Three days after the death of the suffering servant the shoot of new and eternal life would push back the stone from the rock-hard tomb, the place of death.



And the green shoot would live
and offer life! Eternal new life...

Again, to you and me.

Again, to those we may be
preparing to gather with over
Christmas ahead.

Again, for those facing despair
and death.

It will grow in the hearts of the grieving, in the lives of the lonely and unloved and it will form inclusive communities of love where no one...no one is excluded.

It will come to you and me as the Spirit carries the new life of the one whose name is Immanuel, God with us into our lives as the life-giving word works in our hearts.

And it will call us to share it where we go.

The plant will grow. It will break through the places where death and despair would try falsely to rule.

Will you tend the seedling in your heart and the hearts of people you know and love?

Don't wait for the tree to be full grown. God comes to us in this Advent time and invites us to grow with him where we are now.

O come, O branch of Jesse, free.

Your own from Satan's tyranny;

From depths of hell your people save,

And give them victory o'er the grave.

Rejoice, rejoice!

Immanuel shall come to you O Israel. Amen

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>