

The Shoot of Jesse Advent 2 - 5th December 2010

Readings:

Isaiah 11:1-10

O Lord, we have come here this morning hoping to see you, desiring evidence of your presence among us. Sometimes it seems to us that the world is run by forces, ruled by powers which are alien to your will and your way. Therefore we pray that you would give us eyes to see your advent among us. Give us the imagination, the courage, to see your reign breaking in among us. We thank you for the assurance that you have not left your world to itself, and that you will not let us go until you have perfected what you began in creation - that the wolf will live with the lamb, the calf and the lion will live together, and a little child shall lead them. AMEN.

What's your favourite book in the Bible? Do you have one? My favourites are the Book of Psalms and the poetic parts of the book of Isaiah.

What about Jesus? What do you think his favourite was? Well from the amount of times he quoted from it, I'd probably say it was the Book of Isaiah.

And perhaps one of the reasons it was a favourite of Jesus is some of the images that are contained in that Book. We have one such image in our reading today. The image of a stump, cut down, but not dead. The image of shoots and branches emerging from a seemingly dead tree trunk. This is a very Australian image... ..Now I couldn't bring a gum stump into church this morning but I'm sure you all have images of gum trees with new life poking through seemingly dead trunks. Or the greening of the forest after the devastation of a bush fire. Miraculously the forest comes back to life.

Well Isaiah uses the shoots from the stump image to tell it how it is to be with his nation Israel. In context the image comes after Chapter 10 of Isaiah which is a chapter full of words of judgement. Judgement against the nation of Israel for its waywardness; and judgement specifically against the kings of Israel.

In Is. 10:1-3, Isaiah says,

"Ah you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive laws that turn aside the needy from justice and rob the poor of my people of their rights so that widows may be your spoil and orphans your prey. What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help and where will you leave your wealth?"

In Isaiah's day these words were specifically about the judgement that would come from far away Assyria. His prophetic words were imbedded in the history of his time, but they are also timeless, and have a familiar ring to them even today or perhaps especially today.

Isaiah's words of judgement conclude in Chapter 10 with these words,

"Look the Sovereign, the Lord of Hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the tallest

trees will be cut down and the lofty brought low. He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an axe and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.”

Clear explicit words of judgement. But with God, words of judgement are never the last word.

Hear how chapter 11 begins:

“ A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”
Isaiah knows of the judgement to come to the leaders of the people of Israel, but he also knows that God will redeem, will use the stock of King David to bring new life.

Here we have a resurrection image, some 5 centuries before Jesus’ resurrection. An image of hope for a nation that was to be devastated; an image of hope for individuals who would seemingly lose all.

And it was no surprise that upon Jesus’ death and resurrection the early church claimed Isaiah’s prophecy as its own. It fitted Jesus perfectly - Jesus was from the stump of Jesse. He came to bring new life. He came to bring justice, to rescue his people. Only this time his people were not just the people of Israel but the people of the whole world.

And that’s how God’s word works. From a specific word uttered by Isaiah to bring hope to a people oppressed by poor rulers and the hordes of the Assyrians, God’s words take on a life of their own down through the generations.

The words came to the people of Jesus’ day, with the advent of the new shoot Jesus, whose resurrection brought hope to a persecuted church; and they come to us today, when so many of us need a word of hope.

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

This is a promise of a second chance. Not just for the people of Isaiah’s day, but for us also. When the shoot from the stump of Jesse reigns, when Jesus Christ reigns, says Isaiah, “He will not judge by what eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but he will judge the poor with righteousness, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” Jesus Christ will set the standards - not our politicians or economists. What a refreshing change when so much today is judged by outward appearance, where the image masquerades as the reality. People being judged by how they look not who they are.

And our passage goes further. It talks of peace. True peace. Where natural enemies will come together and sit with one another. The wolf and the lamb; the leopard and the kid; the Israeli and the Palestinian; Christian and Muslim in Sudan. Here is a picture, an image, that we all long for, that we dream about. Not just with the animal kingdom. Not just with warring factions a long way overseas, but here and now in our own community, in our own families. Think about it.

In our own families there are those designated as wolves and lambs - or is it black sheep. I know of families within church communities where members have not spoken to one

another in years, because of some hurt experienced in the past and neither forgotten nor forgiven.

I know of congregations where members harbour grudges that are years old. And there are some of **us** who carry hurts with us that never seem to heal.

Well Isaiah's message of hope is for us. A message of peace and goodwill that gets sung about every Christmas, but is harder to realise.

For peace and goodwill to reign this Christmas in our families, in our community, and between nations, it needs to start with a true recognition of the shoot that grows from the stump of Jesse. The one who comes in Isaiah's words to bring the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the one who brings true justice for all.

That's what our Christmas preparations and celebrations should be about. They are yet another opportunity for us to recognise the Christ coming to each of us so that we might have peace, peace within ourselves, peace with each other and peace with God.

Now there's a dream, a hope, a time when the wolf and the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the lion with the calf - when all, no matter what their differences, can sit down with each other in peace. But for most it remains just that - only a dream, a hope that this is for the distant future. It could not possibly happen now. That's what they're saying in Israel/Palestine today. It's too hard, you can't trust those Jews/Arabs/Serbs/Croats/Muslims/Hindus/Protestants/ Catholics/whatevers.

But it need not be so. Isaiah's words are for us today. God through Jesus Christ has shown us how to bring about this peace. If we are willing to let a little child lead us. That little child is Jesus Christ, born in a wooden manger, crucified on a tree, and resurrected as a new shoot to be with us now so that we might know peace today.

So - let us live this Christmas as if we believe it. Let us through our living become part of that new shoot, that new branch and become channels of God's peace. Let us move through Jesus the Christ from dream to reality.

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