

Advent 2A
Isaiah

Isaiah 11: 1-10

1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 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. 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 6 The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. 10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

The text we read from Isaiah is so gorgeous, isn't it?

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It's so gorgeous, in fact, that I can easily get caught up in the images, and think to myself, "Won't that be an amazing day." I escape into this vision of God's new day, which is, quite frankly, a lovely place to rest these days.

But this vision from Isaiah wasn't written as poetry outright, but instead was written in direct response to a brutal and violent Assyrian Empire, which was destroying Judah.

- A bit about context
- Isaiah – Northern kingdom
- Micah – Southern Kingdom
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The people of Israel have lost their promised land, their hopes have been destroyed. They are living in a harsh reality, and it is into this reality that Isaiah speaks – offering hope and vision and courage.

But do you remember what comes at the beginning and end of this passage? It's not radical images of peace and reconciliation, but instead we hear that a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Like that tip of the crocus piercing the hard frozen ground in Minnesota spring. Fierce, persistent, stubborn, and small.

I think that the American ideal of change, whether in our corporate life, or in our personal life is heavily weighted towards sudden, abrupt, some might even say miraculous change. Maybe this is a human propensity, but I notice it so much in our culture. We see it with our quick fixes with everything from diets to elected office. We have schedules to keep, and so change must keep pace with our agendas...

But this text challenges us – calling us into a more boring, plodding, steadfast, and in the end, a more resilient kind of change.

If we only pay attention to the net result, what we see is that suddenly, one day, a shoot just pops out of a dead stump. Maybe it was as easy as that, or maybe we didn't see the intensity of purpose that went into the apparent change.

- I just posted a picture of my **7 month old crawling** on Facebook. The crowd cheered! Yay Eleanor! She's so big! Crawling, already?!? If you asked that baby girl, though, she would look at you with her big eyes and say, "Are you kidding? I've been at this for every waking hour, and a couple sleepy hours, for the last several weeks. Do you see the bumps on my head from where I've fallen. Do you realize how hard this has been?"
- As the campus pastor, I end up walking with students through a **good share of depression and anxiety**. And there's nothing that challenges a quick fix like depression or anxiety. Eyes cast downward, filled up with tears. We talk, and we pray, and I check in every once in awhile. And then, at some point, I see this student at one of our events and it's like the fog has lifted. And maybe, in that moment, the Christmas party, or Mountain Vespers, or good grade was enough to clear the darkness. But more than likely, it was a lot of hard work with a counselor, learning and growing, and struggling and praying. And slowly and surely, the light began to emerge again. A small change. A subtle change. And a world-changing reality for the person living with depression or anxiety.
- Last story, for now. **Marriage equality** is legal in this state. Same sex couples are featured in commercials for engagement rings, and Kohl's sales. But this didn't happen overnight. It was decades in the making for fearless gay folks, claiming their beloved identity as children of God in the face of vitriol and violence and bigotry. And in this state, the legalization of marriage was also the result of thousands of one on one conversations – individual people – gay and straight – having caring, brave conversations with people they knew who disagreed with them. Gay marriage didn't just

happen. That shoot didn't just spring out of a dead stump one day. It was millions of small actions that gave rise to change over time.

As we contemplate what it really means for the wolf to lie down with the lamb, for a toddler to play with a poisonous snake; we all have a bit of soul searching to do, I think. Peace, with justice, doesn't just miraculously appear one day. Human dignity isn't simply bestowed. The world, at least as we know it now, doesn't simply begin, or end, one day.

In the wake of the election, I've heard, and experienced, so much "this is the end of the world" language.

And then I came across a recent New Yorker interview where President Obama was recounting how he explained the election results to his daughters:

"...your job as a citizen and as a decent human being is to constantly affirm and lift up and fight for treating people with kindness and respect and understanding. And you should anticipate that at any given moment there's going to be flare-ups of bigotry that you may have to confront, or may be inside you and you have to vanquish. And it doesn't stop. . . . You don't get into a fetal position about it. You don't start worrying about apocalypse. You say, O.K., where are the places where I can push to keep it moving forward."

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

Advent is a time to actively anticipate the coming Kingdom of God, to see in the visions of God's new day, and to prepare the way of the Lord. Whether in your heart, or home, or community, we are called into the work of transformation, in the small, subtle, humble steps of re-orienting our lives towards God's vision for humanity. Though we wait in the darkness for Christ's bright light to break in, we are simultaneously called to be that light in our world.

Hear this good news, brothers and sisters. God loves you, and forgives you, and beckons you forward, before or beyond anything you can do or not do. And God gives you one another on this journey, sojourners on the road towards healing, reconciliation, redemption and renewal. As you go out from this place, point towards the signs of God's new day breaking into our reality, and participate with God, and with one another, in creating a more just, merciful, and peaceful world for all of God's children.