

Sermon: "Peace through the Root of Hope"

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10, Romans 15:4-13

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The Prophet Isaiah is the most quoted in the New Testament from the Old Testament and has most messianic passages which foretells of the coming of Christ. Today's passage from Isaiah 11 is one of those passages, resonating with 2 Samuel 7, that Messiah will be a descendant of David, son of Jesse.¹ Hear now the Word of the Lord from Isaiah 11:1-10.

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,

¹ 2 Samuel 7:11-17

and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They 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.

¹⁰On 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.

Today's second Scripture reading comes from Romans 15:4-13. Paul describes what a new life in Christ should look like in the last few chapters of Romans, and in today's reading, we can find Paul subscribing that we too need to welcome others as Christ has welcomed us. The same Christ, the Messiah, who was foretold in the days of the old. Listen now to the Word of the Lord.

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess^[a] you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰ and again he says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹ and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹² and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sermon: "Peace through the Root of Hope"

Text: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Let us pray:

God of hope, it is through your grace that we have been led to worship you, to honor and praise you this morning. We pray and ask, would you soften our hearts, open our ears, and may you illuminate your love in our lives and in these words? May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

It is already a second Sunday of Advent. Thanks to Thanksgiving being so close to Advent this year, we are moving right along from giving thanks to our Lord and to one another to waiting expectantly for the arrival of Christmas, the longest and most consecutive birthday celebrated in humankind's history. There are even stories of how Christmas brought enemies in the trenches together during World War I to bring peace for a time. Christmas has become a tradition for many families, including mine, and it has led some of us to overlook many of its symbolism and what it reminds us of. This was reminded to me over the Thanksgiving weekend, as I was putting up Christmas decorations at my childhood home.

One of many Christmas lights that goes up in my parent's house includes placing green lights high up on the tree branches and wrapping a white light around the trunk of the tree by the street. Our newest sister-in-law, visiting and joining us for holidays for the first time asked why we do that, seeing no other houses near us hung lights on their tree. That is when I had to explain that when we were younger, all of the houses on this street would decorate the tree the same way, lighting up the streets to make it look like a street full of an evergreen trees, to bring life back to the leafless trees and streets during Christmas holidays. Over the years, many of our neighbors have moved and the new ones have come and gone, and this tradition has been somewhat forgotten, but my mother insists that we keep up that tradition.

We need to be thankful for all the traditions and wonderful sharing of holiday cheers with one another, but every often, it is also important to remember why we have that tradition. We have this wonderful Chrismon tree that is put up each year during Advent. Did you know that Chrismon trees are special Christmas trees that uses only white and gold colors for their ornaments? They are a testimony of God's faithfulness, as each one of them are handcrafted by the members of this community, as angels and symbols that represents Christ are clothed upon the tree. Chrismon trees are never finished projects, as we are all invited to be a part of this tree by adding our piece of testimony to it.

There are many stories of origin that explains why we use evergreen trees for our Christmas decoration, but here are few of my favorite explanation of why we use them for our trees. 1)

it is a tree that endures and shows life throughout the harshest and coldest times, as to represent the faithfulness of God and 2) it is a triangle shaped, visibly being doctrinally correct shape to represent the one Triune God.

Which brings me back to today's passage: Prophet Isaiah uses an image of tree to forecast the coming of Messiah through the family of Jesse and David.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. – Isaiah 11:1

Paul reminds us all, whom Christ is here to save:

*The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope. – Romans 15:12*

It is not just the Jews, but for all humanity that God of hope came down and took human form. Using Paul's imagery, it is God, the Root of Hope, who supplies life to a dead, cut-down tree. A stump has no future, it has no purpose, and it definitely does not have a sign of life. Yet with God, all things are possible, and through God comes a nutrient of grace and everlasting water that renews life and makes all things new. A shoot, Jesus, on whom Lord's spirit rests upon – the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of the Lord – gives a second chance at life.² We are his branches, bearing the fruits of the spirit through our supplier of life, God of Hope.

So maybe the best explanation of why evergreen tree is used as Christmas tree should not be whether the tree may portray God's character or a doctrine, but rather it should show the heart and will of God. And as God, Christ, and Paul invites us, let us welcome all those around us as well as ourselves into the grace of God. Then the Prince of Peace shall reign, and we shall join the heavenly choir

praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on the earth peace among those whom God favors!"³

just like the soldiers have done on that faithful wintery Christmas eve in 1914.⁴

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit, Amen.

² Isaiah 11:2

³ Luke 2:13-14

⁴ <https://time.com/3643889/christmas-truce-1914/>