

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**

**December 8, 2013**

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- 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; 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. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.*

Have you ever seen someone who is dispirited and demoralized? Perhaps it is a member of a sports team or a fan of that team. The team is playing in the championship game, but reality is starting to set in. The team is going to lose and there is nothing which will change this fact. The players are sitting on the bench with their heads down and shoulders slumped. The fans in the stands are sitting with their heads in their hands and tears running down their face painted cheeks.

I could go on with many more examples, although I think you get the picture. People who are dispirited and demoralized feel that way because they are in a hopeless situation. They are in a situation which cannot be changed. Their fate has been sealed and the reality of the hopeless situation is starting to set in. This reality makes people sad. It makes them feel dejected. It makes them feel numb. It causes them to give up.

What could improve their mood? What could take these people from dispirited and demoralized to happy and excited? One thing can bring life back to those who are dejected: hope. Hope is something which people can rally around. Hope is something which people can get excited about. Hope is the promise of my current situation changing and getting better. Hope might be a player returning to a team or a turnover at a crucial part of a game. Whatever it is hope is something to rally behind.

Our lesson today points to a time when the people of Judah would find themselves in a hopeless situation. Isaiah looks forward to a time when the king of Judah will have been chopped down and nothing will be left of its kingdom. Nothing will be left of David's family tree except a stump and the kingdom of Judah will have been deported. The stump serves as a memory of better times, but it also serves as a witness of God's judgment.

David's line was chopped down because the kings of Judah rejected God. They served other gods instead of whole heartedly serving the Lord. The people's halfhearted service led God to chop David's line down and deport the people of Judah from their homeland. This is the hopeless situation Isaiah looks ahead and sees. He looks ahead and sees people dispirited and demoralized. He looks ahead and sees people who are longing for good news and a spark of hope.

What can Isaiah offer to these people who are longing for a spark of hope? **"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."** Isaiah offers them hope. He tells them the impossible will happen. He promises them a shoot will come up from this dead stump. Stumps aren't supposed to produce life. Stumps aren't supposed to create new trees. They are dead. They are lifeless. However, Isaiah promises David's line will start growing after it has been cut down.

What will this branch look like? **"The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- 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; 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. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."** This branch is going to

wonderfully equipped. He is going to be powerful and wise. He will delight in the Lord. He will be able to read hearts. He will help those who suffer injustice. He will slay the wicked. God's righteousness will be part of him and he will never go anywhere without it. He is someone to rally behind.

Who is this branch Isaiah is writing about? Isaiah is writing about Jesus. His words paint the perfect picture of Jesus and his work here on earth. **"The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- 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;"**

**"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. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."** Isaiah tells us the Holy Spirit will rest on Jesus and he will be filled with knowledge and power. He will use this wisdom and power to establish his kingdom. This kingdom will be a kingdom to rally behind.

What will this kingdom we want to rally behind look like? Isaiah describes Jesus' kingdom which he wants us to rally around like this, **"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox."**

**"The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious."** Isaiah tells us Jesus' kingdom will be a place of rest because sin has been removed from it.

The peace of heaven is complete and total. It cannot be improved upon. How complete and total is it? It is so complete and total that animals which usually don't get along will get along. The wolf won't try to attack and kill the lamb. It will live with it. The leopard won't eat the young goat. It will lie down with it. The lion won't hunt the young cow. They will live and peace and harmony. The lion will eat straw like an ox. This peace will be so complete a young child will herd them.

This peace will be wonderful, but there is still more to it. Infants will be able to touch deadly cobras and toddlers will be able to put their hands into the viper's nest without worry or fear. These animals will not harm them. They will not attack them. They will be at complete peace with them. How will all of this be possible? It will be possible because Jesus will have removed the curse of sin forever because he gave his life to make it possible.

This is the promise God wants us to rally behind. He wants us to rally to his righteous branch. I think it is a good time to ask the question. Do we do our best rallying behind this righteous branch? How much effort do we put rallying behind this branch? How much time do we give to this righteous branch? I want us all to stop and think about our week ahead and evaluate it. Do we put more time in rallying behind our righteous branch or behind our favorite team or activity?

Think about this afternoon. Will you spend more time watching the Packers or your favorite football team play than you will with the Lord today? Will you talk more about your favorite team than your Lord this week? Will you read more about your favorite team than your Lord? Will you listen to others talk about your favorite team than you will to your Lord speaking to you? What would you rather rally behind: your favorite team or your Lord?

The spiritually wise and mature answer is to say our Lord. The spiritually mature part of us says we would much rather rally behind Jesus than behind our favorite team. We know Jesus has given his life for us. We know he has made us his children and his kingdom is one to rally behind. This is good to say, but how often do we put it into practice? Would someone who has never met us be able to tell we rally behind Jesus and he is the top priority in our life by simply looking at where we put the most effort in?

My sinful pride cries out of course a stranger could tell I rally behind Jesus rather than my favorite team or activity. However, I know my heart. I know this isn't always true. I know during the week I sometimes put more effort in and give more attention to my favorite team or activity than I do the Lord and his work. I know if I looked at your schedules and talked with you that you do it too. Don't try and deny it. I know you do. Why? Why do we rally to other things more often than Jesus?

It is because it is hard to rally behind something we can't see right here and now. It is hard to rally behind someone we can't physically touch. It is hard to rally behind someone who makes us a target for ridicule and scorn. It is something our sinful nature doesn't want us to rally behind. What should we do to help us rally behind our righteous branch? We should hold the promise of Jesus' kingdom before us and remember how Isaiah describes it.

**“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”**

**“In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.”** This message will revive us and bring us back to rally behind our righteous branch. Amen.