

Advent Devotional December 19, 2018

Scripture

Isaiah 11:10-16

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. ¹¹On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

¹²He will raise a signal for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.

¹³The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,
the hostility of Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim.

¹⁴But they shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west,
together they shall plunder the people of the east.
They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab,
and the Ammonites shall obey them.

¹⁵And the LORD will utterly destroy
the tongue of the sea of Egypt;
and will wave his hand over the River
with his scorching wind;
and will split it into seven channels,
and make a way to cross on foot;

¹⁶so there shall be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant that is left of his people,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from the land of Egypt.

Devotional

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The title of Thomas Wolfe's novel *You Can't Go Home Again* became a household phrase after its posthumous publication in 1940. Indeed, that concept seems like an apostasy during the season of Advent, when, for better or for worse, we often find ourselves immersed in complicated family systems that can, in fact, evoke a sense of home. But the notion of home for the original audience of today's devotional text was a luxury that was as foreign to some of them as their own surroundings were. After all, the United Monarchy of Israel had split into two kingdoms, and the ravages of war had left hundreds of thousands of Israelites displaced, much like Joseph and Mary at the time of Jesus' birth.

As hearers of today's text, we are invited to imagine a future when the Lord will "acquire," "gather," and "collect" those who have been dispersed. We are encouraged to envision a destiny in which a babe born in a lowly manger is "lift[ed] as a signal flag for the nations" and, in the process, "draws all people to" himself (John 12:32). We are inspired to hope for a "road" that is "the way, and the truth and the life" for all of us (John 14:6). This road leads us out of the exile of sin and death and assembles us together, here, at the foot of the manger, where we wait for the coming Messiah. Waiting reminds us that Christ in our world changes our reality: those who were dispersed are reassembled, reunited, restored, and adopted into the family of God through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for loving us so much that you created a forever home for us in the Christ babe. As we gather with family and friends to wait, fill our hearts with the hope, peace, joy, and love that are the hallmarks of the Advent season. Amen.