

Advent Devotional December 18, 2020

Scripture

Isaiah 11:1-9

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.

Devotional

The Rev. Norma Prina Murphy '93

Out of the multitude of ways to go in considering this text, here in this brief meditation I would focus our attention on verse 1: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." On one side of my in-laws' property there was once a row of Scots pines along the street. There were at least 15 of those trees, possibly as many as 25, closely spaced. The pines were at least 30 feet tall by the time my high school boyfriend (and later husband) and I began seeing each other. But then a blight hit and the pines died. My father-in-law cut them all down, leaving 3-foot stumps.

Imagine that row of stumps! As beautiful as they had been to drive by before, that was how awfully dead and barren they looked now. No shoots ever came forth from them. Over time they rotted and years later were pulled down.

The stump of Jesse that Isaiah speaks of is just as awfully dead and barren as those Scots-pine stumps. In fact, it was worse: the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had fallen, and God's Spirit was AWOL. Only in the voices of the prophets was God's Spirit evident. And they were largely ignored.

But there is a promise here as well—and hope! Hope today for countries laid waste by war or drought or famine. Hope for people laid waste by greed or pandemics or racial bias. Hope for the world that there will be, someday, the fullness of the reign of that shoot, which did indeed come forth as Isaiah prophesied.

Where is your life, or your congregation's life, now barren, laid waste, like a thoroughly dead stump? Can you possibly imagine new life, or at least be willing to see God's image of new life for you? Not the same life ever again, but something transformed and new, coming out of it? That is the promise of God in Christ Jesus, and it is even now in the process of being fulfilled. Can you find hope that it will be fulfilled in you as well?

Prayer

"Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!" We pray to you, good and gracious God, to bring forth the Christ in such blooming flowers, both in us and through us. We pray in the name of the Son of Jesse's son David—Jesus—and in the power of Holy Spirit. Amen.

A selection of YouTube choices for *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*:

The Raleigh Ringers (handbells)

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=tFm9yq-OZLs&feature=share>

David Haas (contemporary setting)

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=MkGfzHBXzbc&feature=share>

Mannheim Steamroller all instrumental (contemporary and baroque styles)

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=6kJiXaw-ePk&feature=share>

Ann Arbor Youth Chorale (traditional setting with the first verse repeated in German)

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=xz8SiCf31Hs&feature=share>