

Advent 2A  
December 8, 2019  
Isaiah 11:1-10

## **GOD'S DREAM**

When 100+ miles an hour winds tore up the Oregon Coast some years back, one of the better known casualties was the Klootchey Creek Giant, a 750-year-old Sitka Spruce off Highway 26 a few miles from Seaside. Chris grew up with that tree; she passed it every time she went to school in Seaside. And every trip our family made to visit Jay and Nancy at Hauger Mountain took us by that tree.

The largest Sitka in the world and one of the oldest living organisms in the state of Oregon, it had stood over 200 feet tall and was 17 feet in diameter.<sup>1</sup>

Today, though its crown no longer scrapes the sky, the remaining trunk and two fallen sections still convey the giant tree's massive size.

Now travel with me from the 21<sup>st</sup> century CE to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and from the Oregon Coast to the Middle East, and imagine with me for a moment a whole forest of trees like that spruce, mowed down, with clear-cut destruction as far as the eye can see.

**That's what the northern kingdom of Israel experienced at the hands of the Assyrians**—the world's great superpower of that age and God's chosen tool for meting out judgment.

"The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few," says the prophet, "that a child can write them down."<sup>2</sup>

The Assyrians swept down on Israel with devastating power, carrying off the northern tribes into a captivity from which they would never return. Then, turning their eyes southward, they marched to within a few miles of Jerusalem, threatening to bring upon Judah the same fate.

**With the stage set, the question was posed: Do God's remnant people have a future?**

**Onto that canvas of desolation Isaiah throws these bright colors of hope this morning.**

**A SHOOT SHALL COME OUT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE, A BRANCH SHALL GROW OUT OF HIS ROOTS. AND THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SHALL REST ON HIM.**

A slender, green branch of a hope—a sprig from the fallen giant—pushes its way upward through the debris and into the sunlight where, against all odds, the shoot not only survives but begins to grow and even to thrive.

**Once again today, as throughout this Advent season, we sit at the feet of the grandest poet and dreamer the Scriptures have to offer: the prophet Isaiah.**

A SHOOT SHALL COME OUT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE...

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<sup>1</sup> You can learn more about the tree here: <https://www.co.clatsop.or.us/parks/page/klootchey-creek-sitka-spruce-giant>

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 10:19

This dream from God's heart and Isaiah's lips comes at a fragile time in the people's history. In the midst of threats from within and without Isaiah announces a time when God's judgment will turn into a dream for justice, for wholeness, and for harmony.

**And it's no coincidence that Isaiah's dream also includes a little child.**

Children haven't lost their ability, like so many of us grownups, to imagine, to dream, to meet the world with certified belief in possibility.

Of course not all those young creative minds imagine a beatific world. Those of you who are parents of preschoolers know what I'm talking about.

There was a time, about 10 years ago, when our house was inhabited by knights & soot-black dragons, pirates and crocodiles, dinosaurs, sharks, abominable snowmen, and Sheer Khans (i.e., tigers). That's the world Kai and Naomi spent a good deal of time interacting with.

These days some of the characters have changed—as they tend to do with each new generation—but the essence of the drama remains.

**There's a deeper purpose, of course, behind this play. The children are laying down a foundation for an understanding of good and evil. For they have discovered, as 3, 4 and 5 year olds do, that not everything in the world is sweetness and light...**

**...that while their mommy and daddy love them, there are some creatures in the world they inhabit who would just as soon eat them instead.**

Each time they're exposed to a new MONSTER prototype they work to incorporate it into their world by incorporating it in their play; by turning it over and over again in their mind—all in the service of finding a way to tame the monster's threat; to defang it, transform it, or send it packing.

Which helps explain why at this age, often to the consternation of their parents, they (and perhaps boys in particular) also begin turning sticks into guns.

**But hey, if your world were populated by monsters, henchmen, and threatening beasts in every quarter, wouldn't you long for some kind of tool with which to do battle?**

My point is, kids at this age are learning that this world in which they find themselves, is more dangerous than first thought. And their psyche is doing its best to equip them emotionally to handle that news and “plot a solution.”

**Isaiah had seen enough terror and destruction to know firsthand how the world works: power corrupts, violence destroys, the strong get stronger, while the weak are grinded into stumps.**

AND YET, HERE IN THE MIDST OF THAT DARK CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE, ISAIAH DARES TO PUBLISH GOD'S ALTERNATE FUTURE.

- A future where leopards play tag with lambs, where lions become vegetarians, and the rules about predator and prey are turned on their heads.

“AND A LITTLE CHILD,” whispers Isaiah, “YES! A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.”

## What is God trying to tell us here?

**First of all, the child of whom he speaks is not every child.** No, this child of which he speaks is a particular child—the one disguised in verse one as the “shoot from Jesse”—who will judge not by appearances but will treat all with fairness and equity; and who will gird himself for battle not with weapons of iron but with the weapons of the Spirit.

**No matter how hard we try, we cannot WILL the KLOOTCHY CREEK GIANT back to life. We cannot restore its mangled trunk or fallen crown. We cannot return it to its reign as the greatest Sitka—much less can we restore a whole forest.**

**Neither can human will establish the kind of reign Isaiah envisions. Only the Spirit of the Lord can bring that gift.**

And when that reign dawns—and our conviction is that it has in fact begun to dawn with Jesus—nature itself will begin bending its collective ear to a different tune; and the harmony that Eden knew will blossom once more. AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM...

**There’s no future in being a stump, yet, even a stump may play nurse to a shoot which springs from its roots; for after all God is in the hope business.**

**Isaiah, then, is holding up a vision for us today...and a mirror of sorts too.**

This mirror shows us the truth about our propensity to live unfaithful lives with devastating results. But it also reveals a vision of God’s dream which can inspire us—as it inspired Isaiah—to return to God with all our hearts, and in so doing to recover our deepest and truest selves; to believe that God’s dream for the world is not merely a fantasy.

Three weeks back, when we baptized baby Axel, we laid hands on him and prayed that the Spirit of the Lord would 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,
- the spirit of joy in God’s presence.

**These words from our baptismal liturgy—straight from Isaiah—testify that while Jesus Christ is the ultimate embodiment of this Spirit, all who are grafted to him in these waters share in these same spiritual gifts.**

**THE ROOT STOCK OF JESSE has been planted in your lives and THROUGH YOU God is going about the business of reforesting the world.**

**To know the LORD fully, to truly understand God’s dream for this world, is to practice a faith where HURT and DESTRUCTION are no more.**

**This is the dream God is calling us make our own in this time.**

Isaiah dreamed that one day a leader would be born who would embody all these godly attributes; who would bring heaven and earth, humanity and nature together again.

This same vision inspired John the Baptist and called him to keep his eyes peeled for the One who is to come. Like Isaiah, John reminds us that there can be no negotiating with God. Only a complete and unconditional surrender to God's will and purposes will do.

**The Bible's name for that about-face, that change of direction, that turning, is metanoia—repentance.**

The gospel proclaims that it is in this turning that we finally come face to face with God. And in seeing God clearly, our lives—mirrored now in his—come into true focus.

As we look at one another and our world through the lens and mirror of Jesus, we are able to see ourselves as the persons that God intends us to be, and seeing, we move through the Spirit's power toward that vision, step by step by step...

AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD US...

Amen.