Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Advent 2C
Peace, Seattle
December 8, 2013
Isaiah 11:1-10

STUMP SPEECH

Advent began last week with Isaiah—the great poet/prophet of the Scriptures—announcing God's dream for the world. A dream grounded in four texts from four chapters:
Isaiah 2, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 7.

Last week we learned of the power and reach of God's dream for SHALOM; how the gravity of this dream pulls people and nations to its center; and how at that center old techniques for waging war are transformed into new ways of cultivating peace.

This week, the dream continues to be revealed. It is a dream, we learn, that comes on the heels of disaster, a dream that begins with a STUMP.
"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

That STUMP, history tells us, represents the northern tribes of Israel hacked down by the Assyrian army; clear-cut and carted them off—like so much felled timber—into a captivity from which they would never return.

After dealing with the northern kingdom, Assyria turned its eyes southward, and marched to within a few miles of Jerusalem, threatening to unleash upon Judah the same fate.

Zooming in tight on this one stump at the beginning of chapter 11 is Isaiah's way of asking the question: Do God's threatened, remnant people have a future? The unequivocal answer is YES.
A SHOOT SHALL COME OUT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE, AND A BRANCH SHALL GROW OUT OF HIS ROOTS. AND THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SHALL REST ON HIM.

How are we to understand prophetic texts like this one?
The nature of prophetic texts is that they are MULTIVALENT. What I mean by that is they have the capacity to carry meaning not just at one moment in time or in one era in history, but in many.

The nature of God's word as a LIVING WORD is that it continues to live, to speak anew and speak powerfully to each new generation. As the prophet says in chapter 55,
As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, says the LORD;
it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God's word is a LIVING WORD, a DYNAMIC WORD, whose waves and ripples touch the shores of each succeeding generation.

The invitation, then, for us as we hear these prophetic texts is to ask not only how they may have been fulfilled in the era in which they were first spoken, but to imagine what their fulfillment might look like at another time—even including our own time.

Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

When the followers of Jesus searched the scriptures after his death and resurrection, trying to make sense of what they'd just experienced, they heard texts like this one from Isaiah 11 in a new way, and a light went on. AH-HA! they said, THE PROPHET IS TALKING ABOUT JESUS!

By the time the gospels are written, the gospel writers clearly see Jesus as the fulfillment of what Isaiah and the other prophets were talking about—as indeed he is! Matthew is especially clear about this—he quotes heavily from Isaiah and makes the quotes obvious so we can take in his proclamation that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of all that God promised through the prophets.

What I'm suggesting is, because the prophetic texts are MULTIVALENT, it is also possible to see God's promises through the prophets finding fulfillment in new servants who, in the manner of Jesus, have become shoots from the stump of Jesse; who embody (however imperfectly) God's dream of a renewed, reborn, and revitalized humanity.

All over the world this past week people have been remembering the legacy of one of the great moral leaders of our time: Nelson Mandela. "Madiba."

When Mandela was imprisoned for life on Robben Island in 1962, advocates of apartheid thought they had struck the decisive blow; that Mandela would rot away in prison and the reform movement he led would wither.

But instead of weakening or diminishing Mandela, those years in captivity seemed only to strengthen him. He used that time to learn the language of his captors, to fortify his inner life, and to discipline himself so that he would endure. In that crucible of suffering, his soul was strengthened, his capacity for leadership deepened.

During the decades of his imprisonment the conscience of the world was awakened to the injustices of apartheid. And when, after 27 years, Mandela finally walked free into the light of day, he was ready to be the de facto leader of the South African nation.

In the language of Isaiah, the stump did not stay a mere stump. It sent up a shoot from its roots that would grow until the promise of a new life and a new future for ALL South Africans, was realized.

Two weeks ago, when we baptized baby Jordan, 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.

If those words from the baptismal liturgy sound familiar today, it's because they come straight out of Isaiah 11; and here's the point:

While Jesus Christ is the ultimate embodiment of this spirit, each of you who has been 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.

Sermon copyright © 2013 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

All these images in our text about old patterns transformed into new habits, about old instincts exchanged for new ways of being in the world, is God's way of telling us how DEEP and how WIDE HIS DREAM EXTENDS.

> 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.

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.

> "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion," said Nelson Mandela. "People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."[1]

The ultimate embodiment of God's love is Jesus. And it is in placing our trust in him, in following him, in practicing his way of loving, embracing those who are different from us, that God's dream becomes incarnate in our time.

> On that day, the root of Jesus shall stand as a signal to the peoples...and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Amen.

[1] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom.*