

Sermon Advent 3 12-12-18 Isaiah 11:1

Dear Branches of the Vine:

A shoot from a stump? Are we familiar with this image?

Jesus is a shoot, a branch, a surprise growing thing?

Certainly the image was familiar to the people of his day, and to most of us who have a rural background.

Many is the farmer who goes to clear a field and cuts down a tree because it is in the way.

- Perhaps he cuts it off close to the ground and covers the stump with soil in the hopes that it will rot away.
- And many is the farmer clearing a field who comes back and finds that the “dead” stump has produced a new shoot---a new branch, a new potential tree.

The root does not die so easily.

- The power of life remains
- And it insists on growing again of producing a tree again of producing fruit again.

That is the picture of Jesus Messiah that the prophet Isaiah writes about.

The stump of Jesse, the line of David was about done for by Jesus' time. The Messiah promised was certainly hoped for, but actually seeing the Christ, the promised deliverer, seemed gone in the mists of time.

God promised King David that after his death, one of his offspring, a royal son, would be raised up to build a house for the Lord's name. The throne and kingdom of the son would be established forever.

- David's son Solomon built the beautiful temple in Jerusalem but his kingdom did not last.

- Solomon's son caused the kingdom to split in two.
- The great temple was eventually looted and destroyed by an enemy nation and the people of Judah dragged off into exile.
- The family tree of the great King David was nothing more than a ruined stump.
- But God keeps his promises, and from that stump a tiny shoot would grow--- and bear fruit.

The family of David was like a dead stump.

- The chance that the Messiah would come from that dead stump of a family tree seemed hopeless.
- By Jesus' time, the hope for a delivering Messiah, the promised gift from God who would usher in the day of glory that was to come, seemed like a distant dream.

And yet He came. Why?

God had promised King David that his royal line would be established forever and that royal rule would be fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of David.

Psalm 89:29ff "I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure...that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon..."

Isaiah 11:1ff "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...in that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples..."

Unlike other kings, Jesus, the Branch of Jesse, will rule in righteousness and he will destroy the wicked. His kingdom will be a place of peace.

The Branch will be called "The Lord is our righteousness"

Jesus came with new life where life seemed to be gone.

- He came as promised even though only a remnant was able to see him

- He came as promised even though only a remnant was able to understand who he was and what he came to do.

The promises of the prophets were like life energy, waiting to spring forth and bring what God had promised.

- Here was the shoot, the new branch, the new life from the dead old stump of Jesse
- New life that would not be denied, that would not die, that would not rot away like people thought it would.

The life of God in the promises of God would not simply go away. They would produce the gift of salvation in the Messiah that had been foretold.

Called a Nazarene – *netzer* - branch

The prophecy of the righteous Branch is fulfilled when Jesus is born.

- He lived in Nazareth and was called a Nazarene, from the root word *netzer*, a branch.
- John 15:1ff “I am the true vine...you are the branches.”
- To abide in Jesus is to have faith in him as the only way of salvation
- To abide in Jesus is to receive his forgiveness and to live according to his Word.

Here is a story that can be a reminder of what Jesus has done.

A congregation received some funds together to blacktop and expand their parking lot. The larger lot covered a gravel area that had gotten kind of weedy over the years. The blacktoppers just covered the area, assuming the hot asphalt would finish off the plants that had been growing there.

And for a while the new parking lot looked fine. Until spring. Though most of the plants were discouraged by the several inches of blacktop put on top of them, one was not. Not the dandelions. They pushed right through the new covering as if it was not there.

Now there is a shoot even those of us who grew up in urban areas can understand. We may not grasp the image of the shoot out of a stump, but we get the image of the dandelion.

There is a remarkable new life.

- Almost indestructible, the dandelion shows up every spring much to the chagrin of many a lawn owner and covers the world with its yellow glow.
- You can freeze it, walk on it, chop it, cut it, cover it and even poison it
- And still every spring---there it is again.

If there ever was a resurrection flower, this is it.

And the dandelion reminds us that the coming Christ is more than a heart-warming and wonderful story. That new life born in a stable, laid in a manger was not simply a quiet blessing to be remembered during the dark days of the year.

That gift was the powerful new life promised by the prophet, waited for by the dreamers of Jesus' day. There was the new life that could not be denied.

- Jesus came, a miracle of life
- Jesus came, the Messiah who was to come.
- Jesus came and brought all the gifts that God had promised in the old covenant, bringing together all the gifts of the new covenant.

Here is life and salvation. Here is the grace of God we need as we stand among the dead hopes and dreams of people who can't seem to figure out where to look for God with us. Jesus brought life and salvation. He was the very gift that could not be denied.

And he comes to us again. What is our response?

Repent + Obey + Receive

- Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near - Matt 3:2
- Live in obedience to God's Word

- See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy - Colossians 2:8
- Philosophies of the world threaten to take us captive...
 - All religions are true and there are many ways to God – false
 - There are many gods and the God the Bible is not the only one – false
- So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature – Galatians 5:16
- The works of the flesh are sinful --- immorality, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, drunkenness, etc.
- Keep in step with the Spirit means living in God pleasing ways and being faithful to him.

It is not enough to admire the manger scene or cherish the old songs and carols of Christmas.

- The coming is a powerful mystery.
- The Child of Bethlehem is Immanuel
- The very presence of God among us
- The God/Man come to offer us the free gift of salvation sprung as new life out of the eternal love of God for you and for me.

The life that goes to the cross, that pays the price of our sin, that brings the only life that has meaning for us now and into the future.

The gift that promises heaven and life with Jesus eternally.

So we have something to celebrate.

- We have reason for joy
- It is not the Christmas trees
- It is not the wrapping or presents or decorations
- We celebrate the miracle of God with us
- Our sins are forgiven because God cancelled the debt against us by nailing it to the cross.

- We have comfort because the Lord knows all about us and forgives our sins.

A gift that could not be denied, that came as promised, that brings us all that God has in store for us.

So we rejoice.

We pour out our songs and words of praise for the miraculous gift that God is giving to us, to each of us, to every heart that looks to the new life Jesus brings.

Happy Advent, a blessed Christmas.

Jesus comes---and we cherish our God-given, undeniable gift.