**Isaiah 11:1-10** December 4, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Advent 2

 *Isaiah 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—3and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.*

 *He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

 *6The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. 9They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

 *10In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Admire the Kingdom the Advent King Brings**

 In a world where we *expect* power to be abused; where we turn off the radio because we can’t stand what we are listening to; where we are concerned for our children’s safety, maybe physically but more so spiritually; where we hope elections will settle issues but they never do; in a world we will one day take leave of and they will all just keep on fighting; to us in this world, God today reveals a world, a kingdom of a very different sort. It is ruled by someone called the Branch of Jesse. Thank God that he has made you members of this kingdom through faith in Jesus.

 But: that word “kingdom” makes us nervous. It’s always made Americans nervous. Nearly 250 years ago the framers of our nation’s constitution were acutely aware that power corrupts. Power is a poison. Whether power rests with a small committee or a large assembly or one person, it corrupts. Always.

 Those early Americans knew it from their past dealings with England and more surprisingly they had found it out with their fellow Americans. In the eight years the Articles of Confederation had governed America the entire nation had nearly come to ruin. European powers were refusing to lend any more money at any interest rate to the dysfunctional Americans. Many Americans feared a reconquest by the English. They needed a new system of government, but it had to reckon with the fact that power corrupts, whether in a monarchy or a democracy. And so the Framers developed the three branches of power still in effect; not one, nor two, but three so that any *one* branch of power would always have *two* checks on its power, because—say it with me—“Power corrupts. Always.”

 If people would only be good and godly, that wouldn’t happen, right? Are you kidding me? Have you read your Bibles? The goodest ;-) and godliest people of the Bible prove the point. Look at King David. We recently spent three or four months studying him in our Sunday morning Bible classes. In the years leading up to becoming Israel’s king he was the model of good and godly. But when he became king? Do you remember the Bathsheba incident? That is just one of several. Power corrupts.

 God had decreed that the rightful kings of Israel would David’s descendants. But the dynasty of David, or of Jesse his father—depending on how you want to call it—was corrupted by power. They abandoned their God. As David’s descendants lost their way, so did God’s people. God said, “Fine, then my judgment will fall on you.” In the end it was a mess that ended in near extinction for the Israelites.

 That’s why, some 300 years after David, Isaiah calls the remnants of the royal line of David, ***“the stump of Jesse.”*** David’s once-powerful royal house was nothing but a seemingly lifeless stump.

 But you know, there are certain types of tress, that even if you cut them down to a stump, they will send up new shoots. The prophetic eyes of Isaiah saw it, ***“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”***

 The Lord promised a restoration. David’s descendants would again rule. Actually, one of them would rule. Isaiah 11 is a prophecy about that one. It describes someone who would come in the future, as it turned out, 700 years in the future, and he would have a glorious rule as Isaiah here prophesied. We know that one to be Jesus of Nazareth.

 Now, as the prophet describes this promised king and his kingdom, there is a question we must ask. When is this kingdom going to happen? Is the prophet talking about when Jesus comes as a baby in Bethlehem, or is he talking about Jesus’ second coming and eternal life? That’s an important question. So, what do you think? Jesus’ first coming or his second one?

 On the one hand we know that Jesus is the promised Messiah, on the other hand I don’t know anywhere in the world that looks quite like what Isaiah describes here—where the leopard lies down with the goat. Oh, sure, someone’s going to get on their phone and do a Google search to find a video of some guy in Argentina who has trained a goat and a leopard to be best buds, but as they say, the exception proves the rule.

 But back to the question: Is this talking about the here and now after Jesus’ first coming, or the forever of heaven? I believe, and it’s going to sound like I’m dodging the question, but I believe that what we have here is one of the many “Now and Not Yet” passages of the Bible. Jesus himself said, *“The kingdom of God is among you”* (RSV, Luke 17:21) and then again he said, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). The point is that in this time after Jesus we have been privileged to step into a partial fulfillment of what we will fully experience only on the other side of eternity. That’s what I mean by “Now and Not Yet.” What was it the Apostle Paul said somewhere else? *“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully”* (1 Corinthians 13:12)

 As we get ready for the advent of our king, we study this ***“Root of Jesse”*** and the kingdom he brings.

 In Isaiah 11 we find relief from the disappointments of the way this world works. Speaking of the Advent King it says: ***“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”*** Not even a believing monarch like David of the Old Testament could claim to always be led by the Spirit. The one Isaiah sees will be. The event that embodies that was when he was baptized. The Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and the Father declared, *“This is my Son whom I love.”*

 The second thing Isaiah promises is that this Branch from the stump of Jesse, will be the kind of ruler who is capable like none other. ***“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.”*** Just imagine someone who doesn’t need to hear or see the evidence to know the truth! He just knows it! For us it is not that way. One man shared his experiences on jury duty. Most of the cases were pretty uninteresting, but there was one. In that court case he heard the evidence from one side and was quite sure of who was guilty. Then the lawyer from the other side started asking questions and presenting evidence. Soon he said he had no idea what really happened. That’s how it is in our world. But Jesus knows it all. He knows the truth people are trying to hide. He knows the inmost thoughts. He even knows the unspoken motives. There is no fooling him.

 This coming King ***“will judge the needy [with righteousness], with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”*** Not only is he wise and all-knowing, but he is no respecter of persons. The rich will not buy their way out of anything they are guilty of. The wicked will not weasel their way out of answering for their sins. On the other side, those who have been the victimized will receive their due.

 Who, after living in this world and all we can’t stand about it, he sounds like exactly what we want. Except that if this king is that just, that determined for God-level justice and not just human-level justice; if he is that all-knowing, do we not have much to answer for? Who is the one without sin who can cast the first stone? While everyone likes to imagine that their cause is righteousness, and themselves the victim, is that the truth? What about the view from the other side? Who gets to decide who has been wronged and who is just plain wrong?

 The standard is ***“the fear of the Lord.”*** The book of Proverbs has hundreds of wise sayings: some of them are funny, many profound, just about all of them practical. Twice Proverbs says, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (9:10). Which is to say, “You can memorize all these wise sayings and live by them, but if you don’t know and totally respect the Lord, you have nothing.”

 When that fear of the Lord, that respect for all he says is in us, we find ourselves not on the innocent victim side of things, but on the breaker of God’s rules side of things. We cannot imagine that the coming King will look at us and give us a bye. And so start to divert his attention. “Well, what about him?” and “But I didn’t really mean it!” and “It wasn’t all that bad!” and “Usually I do a lot better,” and a hundred other excuses. We sin daily and often, and nothing can excuse that. The 30,000 days of your life that you don’t do a hit-and-run accident don’t justify the one time you do! Every single failure to 100% measure up to God’s standard of perfection is sin that condemns us on its own merits.

 When the people went out to John the Baptist in the Desert of Judea, they heard him preparing the way for the one Isaiah prophesied. In preparing the people John didn’t say, “Try hard!” or “Do better.” Because A)we human beings will always fall short and B)even if we could do better, that doesn’t pay for past sins. No, he didn’t say, “Do better.” He said, “Repent.” And so the people, instead of hoping that they could measure up, they confessed their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. And there, in a baptism resting on the mercy of God, the guilt of their sins was washed away.

 That is the way to get ready for the king who will bring the kingdom our hearts yearn for. Repent! Frequently! When we have tasted the sweet forgiveness of Christ, then we are made ready for the kingdom of the Christ.

 On the one hand, we will fully experience the Messiah’s kingdom in the heavenly future. There ***“the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them… They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.”***

 While that is eternity, insofar as we live in the fear of the Lord, in some small measure we get to experience this on earth. It is Christ’s purpose for his church here on earth. Christ Jesus wants this congregation of believers to be an oasis. In a fallen world, this is to be a little taste of heaven. Here, you are weekly connected with the grace of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament. Here, God’s servants seek to supply your spiritual needs. Here, the fellowship of believers will share your joys and your sorrows. The front of the bulletin with those cute brothers and sisters quotes what God’s Church on earth is to be, *“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony… that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* That’s the “now” part of Christ’s kingdom.

 The “not yet” part is when Christ comes again and the Branch of Jesse’s kingdom fully realized. The wrongs of this world will be made right. Then, we will receive the fullness of Christ’s promises and our faith. Amen.