

Advent devotion – December 8, 2010
Christian Worship Supplement: 703 – My Soul in Stillness Waits

Refrain

*For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits,
truly my hope is in you.*

1. O Lord of Light, our only hope of glory,
Your radiance shines in all who look to you,
Come, light the hearts of all in dark and shadow.
Refrain
2. O Spring of Joy, rain down upon our spirits,
Our thirsty hearts are yearning for your Word,
Come, make us whole, be comfort to our
hearts. ***Refrain***
3. O Root of Life, implant your seed within us,
And in your advent draw us all to you,
Our hope reborn in dying and in rising.
Refrain
4. O Key of Knowledge, guide us in our
pilgrimage,
We ever seek, yet unfulfilled remain,
Open to us the pathway of your peace.
Refrain

With most trees you don't need to worry about their roots. If the stump doesn't send up sprouts, the roots will die on their own as there will be no leaves to feed them. Some tree species send up sprouts from the roots, such as Plum trees. These are harder to fight. Even having the stump ground out won't get rid of them. Prepare for a war... if you're planning on cutting down such a tree in your backyard. A family in North Dakota cut down trees that served as windbreakers because their roots had spread out 3 acres and were forcing the sprinkler system to raise out of the ground. Little trees were springing up all over their property.

The text of our hymn this evening says, “**O Root of Life.**” The root is the life of the tree. Even when the tree is cut down, it fights to live on. The hymn text finds its rich roots in the book of the prophet Isaiah, who describes a tree that had been cut down, but its roots still grow branches, that even bear fruit!

Read Isaiah 11:1-11.

The man by the name of Jesse mentioned in this Scripture text was King David's father. Jesse's son established a ruling dynasty in the southern country of Judah. But the family tree was cut down when the Babylonian army came in 586B.C., removing the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. Like a glorious Redwood tree that falls to ground, so old, so tall, so stately, the family of Jesse was nothing but a stump.

Isaiah was writing his book about 100 years before the Babylonians came. His message was to be a comfort to the exiles deported from Jerusalem, who saw their once majestic city and temple destroyed, who sadly realized the reality that no descendant of David sat on the throne.

From what appeared to be a dead tree, a Branch sprang up, the Root of Life, a promise that the LORD had personally made to David (1Sam 16), a promise made to David's descendants, a covenant made to the entire human race, and through time fulfilled in one of David's descendants, Mary (Matt 2.23), who conceived, carried and bore our Savior Jesus.

It is this Root of Life the author of our hymn calls upon, **“O Root of Life, implant your seed within us.”** From our first reading this evening in Luke 8, Jesus explains that the Word of God is like seed that is cast over the earth from the hand of the farmer. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians talks about planting seed, another man watering the seed, but God being the one who alone can make that seed grow.

The Root of Life planted the seed of the gospel into your hearts at your baptism. The gospel sprung faith to life in your heart, causing you to believe in the Root of Life. When we as faithful believers ask the Root of Life to **“implant your seed within us”**, we are asking that through the preaching and teaching of the gospel in Word and Sacrament our faith in his promises would grow and mature and become evident in our lives, like fruit on a mature tree.

In faith we ask the Root of Life, **“In your advent draw us all to you.”** At this time of year Christmas tree lightings draw big crowds. This week the newspaper highlighted tree lighting ceremonies that took place around Hardin County. Some of the folks interviewed said, “It just puts me in the Christmas spirit.” While oohing and ahing at twinkling lights may make us feel that we are in the Christmas season, Christ’s advent (the anticipation of his coming) turns our focus on to what is truly important about the season.

In our lesson the prophet Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of the LORD Jesus who draws lost and condemned sinners to himself. He doesn’t light up like a Christmas tree to accomplish this action. Isaiah says, **“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.”** (vs10) In war a banner was hoisted on high ground, often a hilltop. It signaled the rallying point for troops in preparation for battle. Here in Isaiah we can’t help but see the symbolism in the Root of Life. In John 12:32 Jesus made a reference to the type of death he would endure, death by crucifixion, and being raised up in his death, he would draw all people to himself. Christ Jesus was hoisted up for the whole world to see, nailed to a tree on a hill. The promised Root was cut down and died. But the tree he died on serves as a rallying point for all people.

Engaged in battle with their sinful natures, their sins, death, hell and Satan, all people of this world are in desperate need of salvation. Salvation is found in Christ’s cross. All people can rally to the cross to find that salvation that they need. In America, the flag stands for freedom. For Christians, the banner of Christ Jesus stands for true, eternal spiritual freedom from our enemies. When Christ comes again, he will stand as a banner for us.

This is why the author wrote, **“And in your advent draw us all to you, Our hope reborn in dying and in rising.”** Death is a topic most people shy away from. It makes them uncomfortable. But to us, death means hope. When we know that we are about to close our eyes in death, we will not die in despair or fear, but our hope is born again, because Christ’s resurrection, given to us in holy Baptism, gives us the sure hope of eternal life with him in heaven.

Our hope is also reborn in rising. We know that when Christ comes again, he will raise all the dead. To some people, this is a terrifying thought. They know that they will have to stand before their Creator and give an account for their life. We know that our bodies will rise and that they will be transformed, to be like Christ’s

body; perfect, sinless, incorruptible. This final resurrection is hope for us because we know that although we, too, must give an account for our lives, we march under the banner of the cross of Christ, by which he covered over our imperfect lives, by which he died the death we deserved for our imperfect lives of sin. We will march into heaven under the banner of the cross of Christ, whose, life, death and resurrection are ours.

That is why we celebrate Advent, because we can't wait for Christ to bring us home, why we sing, "**My soul in stillness waits, my hope is in you.**" Amen.