

“The Ultimate Dream,” Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12; 12/9/2007; Albany UMC

Today’s Isaiah’s text gives us many images. One of them is a tree stump. It is called stump of Jesse. This tree called Israel, the glorious kingdom of David, is felled by an ax, the ax of unfaithfulness.

Picture this round bottom part of a huge two hundred old red wood. It was once tall and strong with many branches. But now the tree is gone. What is left is this dead stump.

In the second verse of chapter 1, God says through the mouth of Isaiah: “I raised children and brought them up, but they reveled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey knows his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, God laments.

Since King David died, the people of God turned their back on God. Their lives were given to all kinds of corruption. As a result, the kingdom had been divided into two, the North and South. The Northern kingdom got defeated by Assyria, one of the superpowers. Now the other half, the South, Judah, was on the verger of collapse between Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Egypt who were all other superpowers in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC of the region

That is a description of the context from a historical point of view. But theologically speaking, they were all dead. The country was already dead. The people of Israel were just a stump, not a living tree. The people who did not know God, the idol worshippers from neighboring countries, came and walked on them. They were a dead stump.

Israel, promised children of Abraham, you are dead. The kingdom of David, you are trampled down by these ungodly foreigners! You are dead! You are a dead stump!

There is no future whatsoever for you to look forward to. Judgment was already pronounced. The tree had been cut off. You were done! Yes, that was the picture.

But, through today's text, God is trying to give a new picture- a picture of life, promise, new order. God wants His people to see what they cannot see, and hear what they cannot hear. God says that a shoot will come up from this dead stump.

There will be a king. With this king coming, there will be a recovery. There will be a turn-over. There will be a new order. There will be hope. Peace.

With this new king coming, the tree will bear fruits, a lot of fruits. With these fruits, people will not have to suffer any more. People will be full; they do not have to worry about what to eat.

One thing you have to do is "Come back to God." Don't try to look for help from people. Don't ally with Babylon. Don't send people to Egypt. Don't declare allegiance to Assyria.

What you need to do is rely on is God for protection. Come to God and renew the relationship with Him. God is not only going to take care of your needs. But He is also going to bring justice. He is going to raise a banner of peace.

This morning, in our Advent season, I join our millions of other Christian brothers and sisters to dream the dream of this new order:

We hear every day from the news that this world is suffering and the situation seems to be getting worse day by day. As St. Paul says in Romans 8, the whole creation is mourning and groaning now for such peace. Paul says: "The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth and waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."

Yes, we want a leader, not someone from the Republican Party or Democratic Party. We need the ultimate leader who has the authority over all creation. Someone who can clear all the messes we humans have made throughout the world. We are in desperation for someone who can undo all the wrongdoings we humans have done in our history. We need someone with righteousness and fairness who will bring peace to this planet.

As Martin Luther King Jr. preached in his “I have a dream” sermon, I want to say to you that “one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

I dare to dream the same kind of dream that we can be really happy. No hurting, no destroying, no killing, no deceiving, no suffering, no starving, no sleeping on the streets, no worrying about anything.

I would like to envision a picture of people who are so happy and overjoyed that they treat each other as their own. I remember some years ago when Korea made its national soccer team to the quarter final in the World Cup game, people came out on the streets dancing and screaming; there was no poor or rich, everyone became one; some restaurants gave free meals to people. The whole country was in cheers and everyone seemed to have the happiest moment in their entire lives!

The same thing will happen! No, even way bigger than this! In this party of Jesus’ coming, it’s not just one particular nation but all nations, all races and all cultures will be in the celebration. And not just human beings! Even animals will be dancing together with children. Can you picture this image: little children and wild beasts like lions and snakes dance together!

O God, thank you so much. Please let it happen now. Let the moment come now! We want you to be here! Let your son, Jesus Christ, come now. Let the king of peace come in our midst. We have been lost so long. We need you. We want you. We long for you. We beg you to come!

We cannot afford any more sufferings. We thought we would be content and happy if we had money. We thought everything would be fine if we had education and job. We thought our lives would be perfect once we married. We thought our lives would be filled with only good things if we did this and that. But, things turned out to be wrong.

Please help us, O God. You are the only one who can do this. You are the only one who has the power. You are the only one who has the key.

Come, Jesus, our Lord. Let your peace be real. No more wars, no more hates, no more divisions, no more sufferings.

Then, what do we do? Is there anything we can do? Yes, one thing is clear. John the Baptist says that we need to prepare ourselves for the way. He says, “Repent and bear the fruits of your faith!”

In other words, “Come back to God. Rely on God! Open your hearts and let the Spirit lead your life, not your greed.”

Try to live practice what you believe!  
Share what you have and take care of the needy around you!

Brothers and sisters, the world seems to be becoming a harder place to live, especially to those who go a little ahead in dreaming a big dream.

But God has not given up on us.  
He is coming. There is a hope.  
Let's trust Him and *be ready for his coming*.