

SMALL BEGINNING

6th December 2025

(2nd Sunday of Advent)

READINGS¹

Isaiah 11:1-10

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*The spirit of the Lord shall 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.*

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;*

*he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

*Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

*The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

¹ New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition of the Bible.

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
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.*

Romans 15:1-9

We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

REFLECTION

(Rev. Toby Keva)

This is one of the plants in my house.



The reason I show you this picture is because this plant actually almost died. When we moved from Shoalwater to Willetton, our plants were the last items that we transported from our house to the manse. And during the weeks of madness and messiness of moving house, I simply forgot to water my plants in the heat of summer! As the result, some simply withered and died.

Now, I thought I had also lost this plant! But, somehow, I refused to give it up. Once we moved the plant to the manse in Willetton, I started watering it again, and again, and again; and my effort paid off: the plant has now grown back and is now even bigger and stronger than ever!

In our reading today from the book of Isaiah, we are also being presented with the remnant of a tree that seems to have already died. The stump represents the House of King David, the ruler of Judah and Israel. From this stump, Isaiah declares, will come a new life; a new person from the House of David who will rule the people.

This ruler, however, will be different from the other kings from David's House who had ruled Judah in the past. This ruler will rule with "wisdom and understanding," "counsel and might," and "knowledge and the fear of the Lord".² He will side with the poor and the oppressed and destroy evil.³

And we can see the fruit of his Kingdom in the poetic vision that Isaiah gives to us where:

"The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them."

(Isaiah 11:6 NRSV)

² Isaiah 11:2.

³ Isaiah 11:4.

In other words, during the reign of this new king, there will be no longer predator-like behaviour because the strong and the weak will live side by side. No one, Isaiah declares, would “hurt” or “destroy” one another because all will be filled by the “knowledge of the Lord”.⁴ In other words, all people in the land will live in peace because all will be following the way of the Lord. The kingdom of this new ruler from the House of David will be the Kingdom of Righteousness and Faithfulness.⁵

But one must pay attention to the detail of the vision. Isaiah does not say that a fully-grown tree will come out of the stump of Jesse! No. He says,

“a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse.”

(Isaiah 11:1 NRSV)

And just like any sprout, unless people care for it, the new plant will never grow into a big and strong tree.

The kingdom of peace, of justice, of righteousness that Isaiah promises does not come like a mature tree with abundant fruits that all people can enjoy. No; the kingdom comes as a fragile sprout that needs nurturing.

Likewise, Isaiah does not declare the immediate fulfillment of the kingdom of righteousness and faithfulness in the land; what Isaiah promises is the beginning of that kingdom; and, unless the people protect it at the early stage of its life, it will simply die.

Indeed, friends, peace and justice and equity—all those lofty ideals that Isaiah promises in his vision—must begin small in our own life and in the life of our community. The great Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, once said,

⁴ Isaiah 11:9.

⁵ “Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins.”
(Isaiah 11:5 NRSV)

"If there is to be peace in the world,
there must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
there must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
there must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
there must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
there must be peace in the heart."

For us, Christians, the ideals that Isaiah declares are also the values of God's Kingdom, and they must begin in our spiritual family, which is the Church. The Church is the microcosm of what the Kingdom of God would look like. There is no point for us to talk about peace and justice and equity in the world if there are no such things in our community of faith.

No wonder that Paul worked really hard to make sure that there was harmony between all the people, Jews and Gentiles, who joined the church in 1st century Rome. It was not an easy thing to do. The diversity of the people who joined the Roman church had their own customs and traditions that could contradict one another. One group may easily feel spiritually superior than the other.

But, Paul reminds them that the strong must support and build up the weak. All must not seek for their own benefit or pleasure. All must follow Christ who did not seek his own pleasure, but who was ready to be insulted on behalf of others.

Indeed, the sprout of God's Kingdom must begin in our own community of faith. The Kingdom may begin small; but if we nurture it well, it will grow into a strong tree that will bear fruit, many fruits!

Remember, just like the kingdom of righteousness and faithfulness, whom Isaiah declares in his vision, will come as a fragile sprout; Christ, the Messiah, also came not as a fully-grown adult, but as a weak and vulnerable baby. It is this Christ child that we are welcoming in Christmas.

And, just like Isaiah's vision should compel us to care for God's sprout, we are called to nurture the fragile presence of Christ in our midst. His Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness does not begin in fullness; it begins as a baby, an important yet fragile existence amongst us. It is our job, therefore, to be the primary 'care-giver' of his presence so that his peace and justice and righteousness will grow mightily to reach out to every corner of the entire world.

Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Can you identify a tiny 'sprout' of God's Kingdom in your life? your family? your community?
2. What can you do to 'nurture' that sprout so that it can grow into a big and mature tree?
3. What are the things that can 'kill' the sprout?
4. What can you do to remove those things?