

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

²The 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.

³His 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, ⁴but 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.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist

and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶The 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.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze;

their young shall lie down together;

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,

and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They 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.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Patrick Picklebottom was impatient for Story Time. When he sat still and waited idly, time moved like a sloth. Seconds felt like minutes. Minutes felt like hours. He wanted to cry, the wait was so painful.

I have felt that way about the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus left his disciples with these words of hope, saying, “I’m coming back. I’m not done. I have to go now, but don’t worry. You have my Spirit, and I will return. You won’t know when, and don’t sit around staring up at the clouds waiting for me, but be ready, because I will return.”

And ever since then, we have looked for Christ’s coming. Because the disciples knew then and we know now, that the kingdom of heaven is not here yet. Life is still not a utopian paradise. Just as the Jewish people wait for the Messiah who will come and bring them peace and justice, we wait for the Messiah to return and finish what was started. Because . . . while we have glimpses through Christ of what the kingdom of heaven is like in heaven and can be here, these parables that pull the curtain back a bit and show us a better tomorrow, we know we’re not there yet. And it’s frustrating that two thousand years after he showed us how to live, we still don’t get it right! So come back already! Bring what we see in Isaiah 11!

Isaiah 11 paints one of the most compelling visions of the future: a shoot springing from the stump of Jesse, a ruler filled with the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might. One who will judge not based on appearance or skin color or wealth but on truth. This messianic figure ushers in a reign unlike any earthly kingdom. It is a reign where the poor and meek are defended, and where creation itself is reconciled. Wolves dwell with lambs, children play safely near serpents, and the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as waters cover the sea. It is a breathtaking picture of peace, harmony, and wholeness—shalom in its fullest sense.

Dr. Michael Chan of Concordia College asks, “Are we forced to conclude then [when we look around at the tragedy, poverty, and injustice that exists] that Jesus was a failed messiah? No, but we may have to concede that his ministry is fundamentally incomplete. A [true] messiah could not leave the world as it is, with evil still on the throne and the poor still in the dust.... At the end of the day, Isaiah 11 ... urges us to the

place of intercession, where we long for creation's promised destiny, [for the one who will bring peace and justice, and where grace has the final word.]”

So, for me, Advent is not just about remembering that Jesus came once. It's about our waiting impatiently for Jesus to return again. We don't just reenact the scene in Bethlehem like our marvelous children will do next week. Advent gives us a chance to dream of what the [kingdom] of God will look like when Jesus returns again. “Can we dare,” as Dr. Corrine Carvalho says, “Can we dare to imagine a [future] so ideal? No wonder this poem [in Isaiah] came to represent our deepest Christmas wish.”

But this vision is not merely a distant dream; it is a promise that is supposed to shape how we live now because Isaiah's prophecy reminds us that God's kingdom is both “already” and “not yet.” Christ has come, inaugurating this reign of peace, showing us how to love radically, and yet the fullness of that vision awaits its completion. In the meantime, we who embody the Spirit of God are called to conjure like prophets visions of that kingdom in our daily lives.

What does that mean? First, it means practicing justice. Isaiah emphasizes that the coming ruler will judge with righteousness, especially for the poor and vulnerable. Our task is to mirror that concern, advocating for those whose voices are silenced and ensuring fairness in our communities. Justice is not based in the coming reign of peace on appearance but on truth, Isaiah says. So do we advocate for judicial, legislative, or federal changes that bring about justice? Or do we sit idly by and indifferently say, “that's not my problem.” Or hopelessly say, “That problem is too big for me to make a difference.” We just have to wait for Jesus to return.

No. We can write letters. We can make phone calls. We can show up and be seen when people wonder if anyone cares. We can practice justice while we wait for Jesus to return.

Second, it means confronting the predatory instinct. Now, the animal kingdom has a circle of life. Elton John and The Lion King instilled that in me back in the early 1990s. There are carnivores and herbivores in this world. Jurassic Park taught me that in the 90s, too, but one day, Isaiah says there will be a world where the predatory

instinct will be removed, as easily as snipping those chromosomes out of their DNA. Kids will ride on the backs of velociraptors and moms can sit their babies down next to snakes and I can finally live out my dream and snuggle with a red panda without it freaking out and scratching me to pieces.

But friends, Isaiah 11 is not just about four legged creatures and venomous snakes. It's about human beings. Us. It's a metaphor for our predatory behavior. *We* need to examine our own hearts and seek out where we might be aggressive and exploitative toward others. Predatory. Do we overcharge for services? Do we deny service or rights or liberty to others? Do we prosper in a system that takes advantage of other races, genders, human rights. Do we make other humans nervous, and will the marginalized who have been harmed by our culture and economic system and legislation ever feel at ease in our presence one day?

Predatory behavior is not just about the food chain. It's about economics, home ownership, access to education, access to healthcare, environmentalism, the judicial system, personal safety, immigration.

I want a world where no woman ever has to worry about someone putting a drug into her drink at a party. I want a world where no woman has to worry about jogging through a remote stretch of a city park. I want a world where no woman has to carry pepper spray on her keychain.

And I want a world where a race isn't judged because of the actions of one person of that race. A world where every skin color is beautiful and valuable. A world where we love and protect the environment rather than exploit and abuse it. A world where no human being is ever considered less valuable than another.

But this is not going to be easy. I heard an ordained minister this week say that if we expect to be friends in the peaceful reign of God with people who are currently our enemies or people who are currently afraid of us, then we need to start treating them as potential future friends today, not demonize them as the opposition. But we live in a very us versus them culture these days. I'm not saying we swing the pendulum insincerely and fake it. I'm not saying we make ourselves dangerously vulnerable by naively

offering our hearts and minds to those who have been at odds with us, but if you believe in the peaceful future where two parties that have been at odds with each other can enjoy each other's company in a utopian future, then this minister says we need to start viewing them as future-friends today. We can confront the predatory nature in ourselves while we wait for Jesus to return.

Third, it means nurturing hope. Over the centuries that have passed since Jesus left the disciples there have been dark days. Plagues and world wars and economic depressions and slavery and sometimes we wonder if God has given up on us and decided that Jesus won't be coming back, but I still believe.

I believe we still have the Spirit and that God's work on earth is not done. We are not supposed to idly and impatiently wait and stare at the clock and moan and groan about how bad we have it now. We're supposed to believe in Isaiah 11 while we wait for its fulfillment, even when things feel nearly hopeless. Scholars believe that Isaiah wrote this poem at a time when the Assyrian army had destroyed the nation of Israel to the north of Jerusalem and had marched south to threaten Judah. The government of Judah was corrupt and weak. It was a time of deep fear. And into that darkness Isaiah cast this vision of peace.

It reminds me of a quote from Dan Savage about the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. He wrote, "During the darkest days of the AIDS crisis we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night, and it was the dance that kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for."

Friends, those are our marching orders. That's our game plan. We've got to do the same in our own lives. We've got to compassionately be with the vulnerable and broken in the morning, advocate in the afternoon for change, and laugh and break bread together as often as we can. At night, we can make advent ornaments tonight and go caroling tomorrow and watch a movie together on Friday because it's the peaceful moments that we're fighting for. The glimpses of how it can be that keep us going while we wait for Jesus to return.

We cannot just sit around and wait for Jesus to return and make everything right. We have to put in some work - keep pulling back the curtain and giving the world glimpses of what can be, what will be. Peace will come. Come, O Come Emmanuel and make it so. Come on church, make it so. Amen.