



Stumped – Touchpoint for November 30, 2022

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NIV) 11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
³ and 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;
⁴ but 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.
⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶ 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.
⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

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

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

*“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”*

The stump is dead.

We need that to be our starting point for this passage: The stump is dead.

It has no future. It has failed in its task. It has not produced the fruits for which it was created, and the ax has been laid to its roots.

We need to read Chapter 10 of Isaiah to understand Chapter 11. Here is how Chapter 10 begins, and it speaks to the generations of Jesse's family tree.

Jesse was the father of King David:

10 ¹⁻⁴ Doom to you who legislate evil,
 who make laws that make victims—
Laws that make misery for the poor,
 that rob my destitute people of dignity,
Exploiting defenseless widows,
 taking advantage of homeless children.
What will you have to say on Judgment Day,
 when Doomsday arrives out of the blue?
Who will you get to help you?
 What good will your money do you?
A sorry sight you'll be then, huddled with the prisoners,
 or just some corpses stacked in the street.

Isaiah continues on with powerful words of judgement. And then ends Chapter 10 with these words:

See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty,
 will lop off the boughs with great power.
The lofty trees will be felled,
 the tall ones will be brought low.
³⁴ He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax;
 Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One.

In other words, “The stump is dead.”

Chapter 10 of Isaiah is full of Doomsday and Judgement. God, it appears, will lay waste to everything. But that will not be the end. Throughout the Bible, from the Genesis stories through the Psalms and the prophets, on to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and ending in the book of Revelation, doom is not the final word of God, but restoration is.

Abraham and Sarah are brought forth as a blessing into a hopeless world. The Psalms of lament end in words of hope and trust. Isaiah proclaims that a branch will spring forth from the dead stump. A resurrection follows a crucifixion. And a new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven and rests on earth, and its gates are never closed.

You see, even after the terrible words of Chapter 10, Isaiah writes these moving words of Chapter 11:

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
 from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

⁶ 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.

⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
 their young will lie down together,
 and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
 and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

Now, before we can begin to jump to the end of our passage and the peaceful kingdom, we have to talk about the way to – the way of the peaceful kingdom.

The predator stops being a predator. The strong stop using their strength over the weak. And it isn't just on an individual level, but on a societal level. I think what this passage has made me see is that a life of faith is not an individual, interior endeavor. It is very much worldly.

The judgement rendered in Chapter 10 of Isaiah is not on individuals, but on a society as a whole.

*10¹⁻⁴ Doom to you who legislate evil,
who make laws that make victims—
Laws that make misery for the poor,
that rob my destitute people of dignity,
Exploiting defenseless widows,
taking advantage of homeless children.*

So, a life of faith is not an escape from this world, but a movement – a dive – into it. The spiritual and the physical are not two separate things, but intimately connected, and repentance isn't an individual and personal morality play, but a relational reality.

What Isaiah is basically saying is, "Don't use your position to take advantage of other people." And just because you're following the law and it's legal doesn't make it right.

In the gospel reading for this Sunday, John the Baptist calls people to "*Bear fruit that befits repentance.*" And "*Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*"

I think this is what Isaiah is saying, and I think John's words remind his hearers of Isaiah.

The stump of Jesse is dead, because it has failed to produce the proper fruits for others. The stump is producing victims, making misery, exploiting the defenseless. So you see, death isn't just a stopping of activity. Death is a certain kind of activity. An activity that takes advantage of, rather than lifts up. Death is any activity that seeks to defeat the other.

And so, this stump is a stump of death because of its effect on others.

And who of us hasn't sat on that stump in our lives? Who of us hasn't sat on that stump of darkness, misery, and defeat at some point in our journey?

And yet, and yet there is a branch that springs forth from that stump. There is still life in that stump. Despite all appearances. Despite all indications. There is life in that stump. There is life-giving fruit.

I remember when I was going through my divorce, some friends of mine who had also been through divorce said to me, "There is life after divorce. You may not think so, now. It may not feel like it, now. But there is life after divorce."

Or in other words, "A branch will shoot forth from the stump of divorce."

In a way, it became my mantra in those early days. "There is life after divorce." And every step, and every waking morning, I heard that promise.

"A branch will shoot forth from the stump of divorce."

And it was true!

In a strange way, my two favorite seasons of the church year are Advent and Lent. I'm not sure what that says about me, but I think I like them because, for me, they are the most honest. They ask me to take a hard look at my life and my world. They don't let me skim over or pass by the pain in my life or the lives of

others. They call me to an honest accounting of myself and my society. And they call me to get back to the source, the root of life. And bear life-giving fruit.

Because you see, bearing fruit does not come by force or will. It comes from being rooted in life-giving soil.

Walter Brueggemann once wrote:

“The world for which you have been so carefully prepared
is being taken away from you by the grace of God.”

Take some time to reflect on those words. They do not go down easily. And yet, I think I am going to make them my daily mantra this Advent. Because I think they summarize the season of Advent for me.

“The world for which I have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from me by the grace of God.”

You see, you and I were raised, we were carefully prepared, to live in a world that is built on ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘to the victor goes the spoils.’ We were taught to turn the golden rule into “Those who have the gold make the rules.”

This was the soil the roots of our lives were carefully prepared for.

We were carefully prepared for an economic, health, and justice system based on these myths. We were carefully prepared to be the lion and not the lamb, the serpent and not the child. And we hold up as heroes those who have been the most successful in sinking roots into this soil.

“The world for which you have been so carefully prepared
is being taken away from you by the grace of God.”

This what the season of Advent is about for me in 2022: Addition by subtraction.

What is it that the grace of God takes away from me?

What is it that the grace of God is deconstructing in my life?

How is the grace of God like an axe laid to the roots of the world for which I have been so carefully prepared?

It can be scary to have the world for which we have been so carefully prepared reduced to a dead stump. What will become of us if we don’t live by ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘might makes right’?

But that world is a tree of death. Rooted in the ways of death. And its stump is a stump of death.

And yet, and yet there is a branch growing from this stump. A branch of grace. A branch of life.

In this world of darkness and death, we proclaim with Isaiah and John the Baptist there is a life and light that still lives and grows in our world. There is a branch bearing the fruits of peace and justice, a branch rooted in the grace of God for all.

“The world for which we have been so carefully prepared
is being taken away from us by the grace of God.”

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taize)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior. For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore. How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree. You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Benediction

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.