

The Second Sunday in Advent
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Saturday, December 4, 2004
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19;
Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Grace to you and Peace from God who is, who was and who is to come. Amen.

Life in the time of Ahaz, king of Judah: the northern Kingdom of Israel and their neighbor Damascus (who are to the north and east of Judah) want Judah to join with them in order to hold off Assyria - which is the BIGGER kingdom to the direct east of all of them. Now Ahaz doesn't TRUST the kings of Syria or Israel; he thinks that they want to form this anti-Assyrian coalition so that after they push Assyria out of the way, they can just waltz right through Judah and have all of their prime pickings. Ahaz doesn't know what to do. He sees his only choice as that of going TO Assyria and asking THEM for help against the other two. Which he does end up doing; but that help comes at a very large price.

Before he goes to the King of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser (how do you like that for your name? And it's more than that - he's Tiglath-pileser III. They thought it was a good enough name to give it to two more people!), Isaiah says to Ahaz, "Don't go. YHWH, the Almighty God will protect us, IF YOU PUT YOUR TRUST IN HIM." There's a condition to this promise: trust, and you'll be safe. The corollary to that is: don't trust in God, but put your trust in humans, and then YOU will have to bear the consequences. Isaiah gives the king, and thereby all of Judah, a look at what this trust in God will bring about. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox." THIS is what the future will be like, Isaiah says. The peaceable kingdom; Eden reborn. And the covenant that God made with David, the promise that God made with David when he was king, was that one of David's descendants will always be on the throne, and that will hold true, for Isaiah began this long passage with "A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." (V.1) Jesse was David's father, and God through Isaiah is making this promise that when this time of great peace comes, a descendant of David will still be on the throne.

Well, by the first century AD (which is several hundred years after the time of King Ahaz), no descendant of David is even CLOSE to being on the throne, which instead is held by a vassal of Rome. Israel has long since fallen, and the southern Kingdom of Judah has taken on the name of Israel. Judah, where Ahaz and Isaiah were, fell not to the Assyrians, but to the Babylonians, and they were taken away into exile, and then eventually came back to a destroyed and devastated Jerusalem. And then came their struggle with the Greeks, out of which the religious groups, the Sadducees and Pharisees grew: Sadducees centered their life around the temple and worshiped there; the Pharisees focused on synagogues and teaching.

And then, out of the proverbial no-where, comes some wacked out guy, out in the wilderness, wearing a tunic woven out of camel's hair, which is held in place by a piece of leather belt; he's eating a diet which would make "Grape Nut" fanatics proud. He's preaching this message of repentance, and of baptism, and

of preparedness, that, depending upon to whom you're talking, is really making a lot of sense, or is just a load of hoohey.

Because he says:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Now it wasn't unusual for the people of faith of that time and place to be baptized – for they were being baptized for REPENTANCE – they were saying 'I'm sorry for the things that I've done. Let me start all over.' THAT was John's baptism – repentance. But he goes on to say there is one coming AFTER him who is GREATER than he is. One who John is not worthy to tie his shoes. He will baptize with the Spirit. John's baptism was a baptism to be repeated over and over again – as often as you needed it. But the repentance of the Spirit, that is a once-and-done-forever kind of a thing.

So why tonight are we reading about John and Isaiah, what do either of them have to do with Advent? Remember how Isaiah started: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." (V.1)? In order for a shoot to grow out of a stump, what do you have to do? You have to have a stump, and a stump is what is left after you cut down the tree. In the place of Ahaz, the tree trunk had become rotted, diseased, decayed, and needed to come down. And those descendants of David were to come up again, from that stump, from the very root itself, that new shoot; who is that new shoot? Jesus, when he comes again.

Isaiah and John are talking about both the "right now" and the "not yet." Jesus is a fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic vision, of the "eschaton", which is the "not yet". John as he baptizes reminds us that we are to prepare for this coming eschaton, this coming time of peace, when indeed "he wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and fatling and child and bears and cows all together. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain." The is time coming when we will take care of the creation, when we will live out the promises that we were given back in Eden.

But how do we do that, in this "not yet" time? How do we get ready for that not yet, even though we're called to live it now, how do we do that? Well, one way is that we pray for peace. We pray for peace actively, we pray for peace on our knees, we pray for peace standing in the checkout line with the world's slowest cashier. We pray for peace when we're cutoff by that jerk driving down the road.

What else do we do? We strive for understanding. For understanding with those who are different from us, either in religion; be they Muslim, or Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, or Atheist; or ethnically: Arab, Vietnamese, Amish, Mexican, Midwestern.

We invite those folks with whom we get along to join us in worship. We invite those folks with whom we DON'T get along to join us in worship. WE come to worship, more often than just Christmas and Easter.

We do things like help out at Bethesda Mission. We help build homes for Habitat for Humanity. We go and visit our neighbor, the one whom we've never really known more than to just wave at, the one who lost her husband after thirty-five years. We go and ask if we can visit. NOT say, "well call me if you need anything": because we all know they never will and we don't really expect them to. But to go over and say that "I'm sorry that I never got to know your husband. Why don't you tell me about your life together."

That is to bring that vision of the Messiah today; we strive to bring it about actively, We strive to bring it

about knowing that it WON'T HAPPEN JUST YET. Still, we work toward that end, spreading the love of Christ to all those around us, whether we want to or not, whether we like those folks or not. We do so in *Preparation*, to prepare for Christ's coming, to live out our life. We do so because we are called by OUR baptism, to prepare for Christ. Amen