

Hang in There! God's Kingdom is Worth Waiting For.

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—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; 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. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 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. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious."

Well, you can say winter is here even though it doesn't officially begin until December 21st. Now imagine someone who has never experienced winter before, and especially a Minnesota winter, maybe someone from Panama or the Congo. It starts with increasingly cool weather. Leaves turn color and drop. Then there is the first snowfall. Someone who never experienced winter before may find that fun and exciting. That first snow goes away and it seems as though things get back to normal. Then it happens. Winter really sets in. It starts getting so cold it seems to suck the air out of your lungs. You come down with the sniffles. Then it snows again, only it doesn't go away this time. And then more snow falls on top of it, and more snow and more snow. Then it gets really cold. It may drop to thirty below and never get above 0 for days or a week or two. December, January and February go by and it seems as though winter will never end. If you never experienced winter before, you may think the world has changed permanently and it will never get warm again. Of course, as a Minnesotan, you tell know better. Spring will come.

Now you understand what God is trying to do for us in our Isaiah reading today. Last week we studied Isaiah and how God's Kingdom is coming. Today may the Holy Spirit teach you to hang in there. The Kingdom of God is worth waiting for.

I. From a hopeless situation ...

Someone explained to me that our Arlington area use to be a forest. I think they said it was called the "Big Woods," or something like that. I would have never known by looking around today. The trees were chopped down. That is how the Israelites felt. They felt like this lonely tree that was being crowded out by bigger trees that blocked the sun from them. But God would come and chop each tree down: the Assyrians would crumble as did the Egyptians; Tyre; Phoenecia; the Philistine; etc. It would seem God came to bring relief. He chopped down all those other trees. Then God came to Israel and what did he do? He took his ax and chopped them down too because like the rest, they had turned their backs on God.

But God didn't just warn them of their end. He gave them hope. Imagine it a hundred years later, as the Israelites were led off into captivity into Babylon, how low they must have felt. It would seem it was over. They pick up the book of Isaiah and they say, "Yeah, God predicted this." But there is more. He not only promised them they will be chopped down. He promised them two other things. First, they will return from their captivity to their homeland. Second, the Messiah will come and deliver them from their captivity to sin and death. In other words, as bitter as winter seems, spring is coming; hang in there. God will deliver them.

We need to hear this message as well. Have things improved over the last 3000 years? Nothing has changed. In fact, you can argue that things are worse. The gospel message of Christ has been preached for 2,000 years now and the world is still full of sin and unbelievers. God said Christ would come soon, but it has been two thousand years and still no return. Every day we age and it isn't pretty and it isn't comfortable. We are getting tired of funerals. It is like the most bitter winter you can imagine and it seems as though it will never end. So many just stop coming to church, and we feel that way, too. Why should we? Why should we continue to read our Bibles? Why should we continue to pray? We fall into this stupor that things will not change and we resign ourselves to living in a cold, dead world.

II. ... God raises up a Savior.

But God promises the winter will end. ***"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—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."***

A shoot isn't much. It seems so small when compared to a hundred foot mighty oak. When Jesus came, he didn't look like much. When he came, he was not found in some palace. David's line had long since been kicked off the throne. The Shepherds

found him in a barn. His teenage mother was poor and lowly and his foster father was one of countless people who worked hard but never got ahead.

Though humble, Jesus is no ordinary person. The Spirit of the Lord is on him because he is God himself. And he will rule as no other because he will exercise perfect understanding and wisdom. And he will judge like no other. Attorneys insist their clients show up to court in a nice new suit and a clean haircut in the hopes of impressing the judge. Jesus is not fooled. He will look beyond what he sees or hears. He looks into hearts. He will know if we are simply saying the words or if we mean them. And he will judge justly and rightly for he is righteous himself.

Sounds like winter got worse. Sounds like there is no chance any of us will ever survive Jesus' judgment. But notice how he judges. "... **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. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.**" He will render judgments that favor the poor and needy. This does not mean that Jesus will gather everyone's tax forms and those who make more than this will go to hell and those who make less than this will go to heaven.

The poor here are the poor in spirit. I ask you, who was the rich in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector? Was it the tax collector who hid in the corner and who couldn't even look up to God because he was a sinner, or the Pharisee who boasted about how much he fasted and gave and how he was better than everyone else? I bet if you checked their bank accounts, the tax collector had more money. But the Pharisee was richer, rich in his own inflated works. The tax collector saw his sin and boasted of no such works. And who went home "justified" or righteous before God? The poor tax collector.

Jesus will render a verdict in favor of those who are poor in spirit and who simply look to God for mercy. He does this because this Jesus will also die on a cross to take away our sins. Jesus came to sinners, through sinners, and for sinners to redeem us from sin and to win forgiveness for us. If you are rich in spirit, you will not pay attention to the message of a Savior because you think you have enough to get into heaven. So God calls us to repent so we are rich in Christ, not ourselves.

III. And he establishes lasting peace.

Now look at what this means. "**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. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.**"

There is a reason they don't put cobras in a children's petting zoo. But a day will come when lambs will not be eaten by wolves and cobras will not bite children; they can actually play together. There will be a day when husband and wife will never argue over anything. Age and death will not destroy us, and we will not destroy one another. Where? On God's Holy Mountain, his Holy Church.

But if we look around, we don't see this, at least not much. Sure we get glimpses of it like how the sun periodically shines through breaks between clouds. We see God's love and forgiveness practiced among us now and then. But one day soon this kind of peace will be normal. This is a picture of God's heaven and the sinless perfection that awaits us. That is why God gives us texts like this. He is telling us the seemingly endless winter will end soon. Hang in there. It will happen.

But it is cold out there right now. How do we cope? "**In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.**" If you get a little tired of the cold this winter, try this. Start a nice fire in your fire place, make a nice cup of hot cocoa. Maybe add a dash of peppermint schnapps. Get into some nice comfortable clothes and curl up in a warm blanket in front of the fire.

What can we do to cope while we wait for this Kingdom to come fully? Curl up with God's Word and promises. Jesus and his the Church has its flags unfurled so people of all nations may rally to it. This happens when his Word is opened and read and preached and as that Word comes to us through his Sacraments. They will keep us warm in a cold, dead world, while we wait for his Kingdom to come.

What do you tell someone who is shocked by their first winter? Hang in there. It will get warm. What do you say to people suffering in a cold, dead world? See what Isaiah sees. He saw a dead stump produce a shoot. See what the shepherds saw. They rushed to a barn and saw a little baby, and went back praising God. See past the wickedness of this world. The Kingdom is coming. Hang in there. Amen.