

### ISAIAH 11:1-5

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> 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—<sup>3</sup> 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; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

### LUKE 3:1-8

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar— when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— <sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. <sup>6</sup> And all people will see God’s salvation.’” <sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

THE THEME FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT THIS YEAR IS LOVE. LOVE IS INDEED ONE WAY TO DESCRIBE THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTMAS.

LOVE, ESPECIALLY GOD’S LOVE, CAN BE BOTH POWERFUL AND EMPOWERING.

THIS DUAL TRAIT OF DIVINE LOVE IS SPOKEN ABOUT IN THE CHORUS OF A SONG BY A MAN NAMED GEOFF BULLOCK, WHO WROTE:

“HOLD ME CLOSE, LET YOUR LOVE SURROUND ME. BRING ME NEAR, DRAW ME TO YOUR SIDE.

AND AS I WAIT, I’LL RISE UP LIKE THE EAGLE AND I WILL SOAR WITH YOU. YOUR SPIRIT LEADS ME ON IN THE POWER OF YOUR LOVE.”

LOVE IS OFTEN SEEN AS A POWERFUL EMOTION. HOWEVER, LOVE IN THE BIBLE, MOST OFTEN REFERS TO ACTION, RATHER THAN EMOTION.

LOVE ALSO DEFINES BOTH GOD AND THOSE WHO ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.

LOVE INCLUDES GIVING AND RECEIVING, AS WELL AS RESPONDING.

1 JOHN 4:7-9 DECLARES” – “BELOVED, LET’S LOVE ONE ANOTHER; FOR LOVE IS FROM GOD, AND EVERYONE WHO LOVES HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD.

THE ONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE DOES NOT KNOW GOD, BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE.

BY THIS THE LOVE OF GOD WAS REVEALED IN US, THAT GOD HAS SENT HIS ONLY SON INTO THE WORLD SO THAT WE MAY LIVE THROUGH HIM.”

POET CHRISTINA ROSSETTI WAS LIKELY INSPIRED BY THOSE VERSES, OR OTHERS LIKE THEM, TO WRITE A POEM BASED ON THE THEME OF GOD’S LOVE REVEALED IN JESUS.

THE FIRST STANZA DECLARES: “LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS, LOVE ALL LOVELY, LOVE DIVINE, LOVE WAS BORN AT CHRISTMAS, STAR AND ANGELS GAVE THE SIGN.”

TRULY GOD’S LOVE CAME TO EARTH IN A POWERFUL WAY IN THE PERSON OF JESUS HIS SON.

THE READING FROM ISAIAH 11 OFFERS A VISION FOR THE TIME WHEN GOD’S KINGDOM REIGNS AND GOD’S LOVE RULES ALL OF CREATION.

THE PROMISED MESSIAH, WHO WILL COME FROM THE ROYAL LINE OF DAVID WILL BE THE ONE UPON WHOM GOD’S POWER AND WISDOM WILL REST.

THE PROPHET’S VISION CAN BE DESCRIBED AS A TESTIMONY TO THE POWER OF GOD’S LOVE.

REMEMBER AT THE TIME OF THE VISION ISAIAH RECEIVED THERE WAS NO KING FROM DAVID’S LINE.

THE LAST DAVIDIC KING DIED IN EXILE AFTER ALL HIS SONS WERE KILLED.

THE ROYAL LINE WAS LIKE A GREAT TREE THAT HAD BEEN CUT DOWN.

IT WAS IN THIS ATMOSPHERE OF LOSS AND DESPAIR GOD’S PEOPLE SOUGHT A WORD OF HOPE, FORGIVENESS, AND RESTORATION.

ISAIAH WAS GIVEN A MESSAGE OF HOPE BORN OUT OF GOD’S LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS.

THE PROPHET DESCRIBED A STUMP THAT ONCE WAS THE TREE OF JESSE, WHO WAS THE FATHER OF DAVID.

THE FAMILY TREE HAD BEEN CUT DOWN, SO TO SPEAK, WHICH MADE A NEW KING FROM THAT LINE UNLIKELY.

AND YET, LIKE THE STUMP OF AN ACTUAL TREE THAT HAS BEEN CUT DOWN, MAY STILL HAVE LIVING ROOTS, SO ALSO DID THE HOUSE OF DAVID HAVE LIVING ROOTS.

MUCH LIKE ROOTS ENABLE A NEW SHOOT TO SPRING FORTH FROM A TREE STUMP, SO ALSO GOD PROMISED THERE WAS LIFE IN THE STUMP OF JESSE AND HOPE FOR DAVID’S ROYAL LINE.

THUS, THE STUMP OF JESSE FOUND IN ISAIAH’S VISION MIGHT BE CALLED THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE SINCE IT POINTS TO THE PROMISE AND PURPOSE OF CHRIST’S BIRTH, AND THUS OF CHRISTMAS.

THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF JESUS COUPLED WITH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION WAS GOD’S COUNTERMOVE TO SIN COMING INTO THE WORLD.

IT WAS GOD SHOWING THE WORLD THE DEPTHS OF HIS LOVE WHICH IS DESCRIBED IN JOHN 3:16-17:

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.”

ONE COULD SAY THAT SATAN THREW A ROCK IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO KNOCK GOD’S PERFECT CREATION SPIRALING OUT OF ITS SPIRITUAL ORBIT.

JESUS IS THE ROCK GOD THREW TO KNOCK CREATION BACK TOWARDS ITS ORIGINAL GOODNESS.

INDEED, SIN EMBODIES-PRIDE, REBELLION, JEALOUSLY, GREED, HATRED AND OTHER THINGS COUNTER TO GOD’S WILL.

BUT JESUS EMBODIES- HUMILITY, SUBMISSION, GOODWILL, GENEROSITY, AND OF COURSE LOVE.

LOVE INDEED IS STRONG. THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE ABOUT THE POWER OF DIVINE LOVE SAYING GOD’S LOVE IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.

AND THE ONE IN WHOM THAT PERFECTION IS UNSURPASSED IS JESUS-GOD INCARNATE, GOD WITH US.

BUT LET US NOT MAKE THE MISTAKE OF BECOMING OVERLY SENTIMENTAL ABOUT BABY JESUS, AS THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD'S LOVE.

REMEMBER HOW ISAIAH DESCRIBED THE SHOOT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE?

IT STARTS OUT WITH HAPPY NEWS, SAYING HE WILL HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD, WHO WILL GIVE HIM GODLY WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING.

HIS WONDERFUL REIGN WILL BE MIGHTY AS ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS AND HONORS GOD CAN RULE.

THE MESSIAH WILL BE A MAN WITH DIVINE INSIGHT INTO THE HUMAN HEART AND MIND. HE WILL GIVE GOD'S JUSTICE RATHER THAN WORLDLY JUSTICE.

SO FAR THINGS SOUND PRETTY GOOD CONCERNING THE ACTIONS OF THE ONE GOD SENT TO REVEAL HIS LOVE.

BUT THEN ISAIAH'S MESSAGE SPEAKS ABOUT ANOTHER SIDE OF LOVE.

THAT SIDE IS ONE THAT PULLS NO PUNCHES AND WILL NOT TOLERATE WICKEDNESS OR REBELLION AGAINST THE LORD.

HERE WE ARE REMINDED THAT LOVE INVOLVES NOT ONLY SACRIFICE AND FORGIVENESS, BUT ALSO AT TIMES IT REQUIRES DIFFICULT CHOICES.

THIS SOMETIMES MEANS THAT LOVE DOES NOT ALWAYS RESCUE US FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN OR EVEN BAD DECISIONS.

LOVE CAN BE HARD AS A ROCK, WHEN THAT IS WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER'S SAFETY OR TRANSFORMATION.

LOVE MAY REQUIRE ANOTHER TO PROVE HIS OR HER SINCERITY AND SEEK EVIDENCE OF REAL CHANGE, INSTEAD OF MERELY THE PROMISE TO DO SO.

THIS IN FACT IS WHAT GOD DID AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND CONTINUES TO DO WITH HIS PEOPLE TODAY.

YES, GOD IS LOVE, AND THAT MEANS GOD GAVE THOSE HE LOVES COMMANDMENTS TO FOLLOW AND EXPECTS THEM TO BE OBEYED.

AND YET THE PURPOSE OF THOSE COMMANDMENTS IS TO ENHANCE LIFE AND WELLBEING NOT DETRACT FROM IT.

OF COURSE, PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS SEE IT THAT WAY. NOR DO WE ALWAYS LIKE THE IDEA OF "TOUGH LOVE." THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN IT IS DIRECTED TOWARDS US.

GOD, HOWEVER, DOES NOT GIVE UP ON CREATION, OR ON WE WHO ARE CREATED IN HIS IMAGE, EVEN WHEN WE KEEP TRYING TO RECREATE OURSELVES IN A DIFFERENT IMAGE.

BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STORIES REMIND US THAT GOD'S LOVE HAS NOT FAILED AND WILL NOT FAIL BECAUSE GOD CHOOSES TO CONTINUE TO LOVE CREATION.

THIS IS ANOTHER SIGN OF THE POWER OF LOVE. IT DOES NOT GIVE IN TO US, BUT ALSO DOES NOT GIVE UP ON US.

THE LORD CONTINUALLY CALLS US TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND ONE ANOTHER.

THIS IS WHY GOD CONTINUALLY REMINDS US ABOUT HIS COMMANDMENTS, SENDS THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONVICT US IN OUR HEARTS OF OUR SIN, AND THEN CALLS US TO REPENTANCE.

AND THE CALL TO REPENTANCE, AS WE OFTEN FORGET, IS AS MUCH A SIGN OF LOVE AS IT IS ONE OF HOPE.

THIS BRINGS OUR ATTENTION TO JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE VOICE OF GOD'S LOVE, CALLING OUT TO PEOPLE TO PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, FAR TOO OFTEN IS PORTRAYED IN FILMS AND ENVISIONED IN MANY PEOPLE'S MINDS AS AN ANGRY MAN.

THE WORDS HE DIRECTED TOWARDS THE JEWISH LEADERSHIP REINFORCE THIS IMAGE.

AFTER ALL, CALLING THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES WHO CAME TO BE BAPTIZED "A BROOD OF VIPERS", SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE WHO HAS ANGER ISSUES.

BUT MAYBE THE BAPTIST COULD BE BETTER SEEN AS A DETERMINED MAN, ONE DEVOTED TO PROCLAIMING GOD'S MESSAGE AND GETTING PEOPLE TO LISTEN AND OBEY.

HE SURELY HAD BOTH A DYNAMIC AND FORCEFUL PERSONALITY.

THIS CAN BE FOUND IN THE DESCRIPTION OF HIS CLOTHING AND THE POWERFUL WARNING FOUND IN HIS WORDS THAT CHALLENGED PEOPLE TO BE HONEST WITH GOD.

AND YET, IF WE THINK ABOUT IT THE MOTIVATION BEHIND HIS MESSAGE WAS GOD'S LOVE, AND THUS GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS PEOPLE TO SINCERELY REPENT.

WHAT MAY SOUND LIKE HARSH WORDS ARE AT TIMES MEANT MERELY TO GET ONE'S ATTENTION, INSTEAD OF BEING AN EXPRESSION OF ANGER.

THE BAPTIST PERCEIVED THOSE JEWISH LEADERS WERE NOT THERE BECAUSE THEY SINCERELY REPENTED, BUT RATHER FOR WHAT WE WOULD CALL TODAY- POLITICAL REASONS.

THEY WENT BE BAPTIZED IN AN ATTEMPT TO STAY IN THE GOOD GRACES OF THE PEOPLE WHO FLOCKED TO JOHN, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED HE WAS A PROPHET.

JOHN'S WORDS TO THEM WERE NOT AN ACT OF "NAME CALLING" MEANT TO TURN THE PEOPLE AGAINST THEM.

INSTEAD, HE SPOKE GOD'S COMMAND FOR THEM TO RESPOND TO GOD'S LOVE WITH SINCERE REPENTANCE.

JOHN SPOKE GOD'S WARNING TO THEM, NOT IN ORDER TO PUT THEM DOWN, BUT TO OFFER THEM A HAND UP.

"REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR", IS A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND A CALL TO ACTION.

SPECIFICALLY, IT WAS CALL TO LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, MIND, AND SOUL.

REMEMBER-GOD CALLING ANYONE TO REPENT IS A POSITIVE THING-BECAUSE IT SHOWS THAT GOD IS WILLING AND READY TO FORGIVE.

THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS FOUND IN SCRIPTURE, THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS AND EASTER, AND OF THE PROMISED RETURN OF CHRIST.

GOD IS NOT DONE WITH US OR THE WORLD, AND THAT ALONE IS REASON TO REJOICE AND BE THANKFUL.

LET US REMEMBER THAT TOUGH LOVE, WHICH CALLS US TO REPENTANCE DISPLAYED IN ACTION AND SINCERITY OF HEART AND MIND, MAY NOT FEEL PLEASANT, BUT IT IS A BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT.

ITS BLESSING IS FOUND IN THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE. IT IS THE LOVE WE ALSO ARE EMPOWERED BY GOD TO SHARE- BECAUSE IT VALUES THE ONE WHO IS TOUGHLY LOVED.

BUT WHEN WE OFFER SUCH LOVE TO OTHERS, LET US REMEMBER, UNLIKE GOD, WE MUST EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES.

LOVE, AS SCRIPTURE SAYS IS -PATIENT AND KIND AND IS NOT ENVIOUS, OR BOASTFUL, OR ARROGANT OR RUDE.IT SEEKS AND CELEBRATES THE TRUTH NOT OUR OWN WAY.

LET US PRAY: HEAVENLY FATHER, WE THANK YOU FOR THE POWER AND PROMISE OF YOUR LOVE SHOWN TO US IN JESUS, AND FOR THE SAME LOVE IMPLANTED IN US BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. HELP US TO WELCOME YOUR GIFT OF LOVE, BY LOVING OTHERS AS YOU LOVE BOTH THEM AND US. IN CHRIST'S NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY; ISAIAH 11:1-5 & LUKE 3:1-8

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