

# LENTEN MIDWEEK 4

March 18, 2020

## AS WE GATHER

The trees of the Bible help us realize why we need a Savior, how God provided a Savior for us in the person of Jesus Christ, and how the saved lives of repentant believers look. Today we consider Jesse's tree, that is, his family tree. His son David kept faith with God, but succeeding generations wandered away, and God let other nations' armies defeat them until only a veritable stump remained. But by the grace of God, from that stump a Branch would come, our Lord Jesus, fulfilling all the ancient promises. From Him springs new, eternal life.

**HYMN** "What Hope! An Eden Prophesied" [*LSB* 342]

## INVOCATION

**Pastor:** In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People:** Amen.

## OPENING SENTENCES *Psalm 1:1-3; 96:12-13; Isaiah 61:1, 3*

**Pastor:** Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the LORD.

**People:** He is like a tree planted by streams of water.

**Pastor:** The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; . . .

**People:** that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD.

**Pastor:** Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD,

**People:** for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth.

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION *Psalm 80:19; Isaiah 61:1, 3*

**Pastor:** Let us confess our sins to God our heavenly Father.

**People:** Heavenly Father, we confess that we are bound to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have "eaten forbidden fruit" in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We have not produced spiritual fruit in keeping with the new life You have won for us. For the sake of Jesus' sacrifice on the tree of the cross, grant us Your

**forgiveness. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let Your face shine, that we may be saved! Amen.**

Pastor: After His triumph over Satan's temptations in the wilderness, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and announced that the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled in Him. The prophet had written, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me . . . to grant to those who mourn in Zion . . . a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified." As a called and ordained servant of Christ I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People: Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM 80:8-19**

- <sup>8</sup> You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.
- <sup>9</sup> You cleared the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land.
- <sup>10</sup> The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches.
- <sup>11</sup> It sent out its branches to the sea  
and its shoots to the River.<sup>[a]</sup>
- <sup>12</sup> Why then have you broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
- <sup>13</sup> The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and all that move in the field feed on it.
- <sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts!  
Look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,
- <sup>15</sup> the stock that your right hand planted,  
and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.
- <sup>16</sup> They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;  
may they perish at the rebuke of your face!

- <sup>17</sup> But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,  
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!
- <sup>18</sup> Then we shall not turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call upon your name!
- <sup>19</sup> Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!  
Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

## FIRST READING

*Isaiah 6:1–13*

(In a vision, Isaiah sees the heavenly throne and hears the promise about the remaining stump of the royal family tree.)

Lector: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

**People: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”**

Lector: And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said:

**People: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”**

Lector: Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said,

**People: “Here am I! Send me.”**

Lector: And He said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Then I said,

**People: “How long, O Lord?”**

Lector: And He said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.”

**People: The holy seed is its stump.**

Lector: O Lord, have mercy on us.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**SECOND READING** *Isaiah 10:33–11:10* (The Branch, on whom will rest the Holy Spirit, shall usher in a peaceable kingdom.)

<sup>10:33</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts  
will lop the boughs with terrifying power;  
the great in height will be hewn down,  
and the lofty will be brought low.

<sup>34</sup> He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe,  
and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.

**11** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

- <sup>6</sup>The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.
- <sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- <sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
- <sup>9</sup>They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.
- <sup>10</sup>In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of  
him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Lector: O Lord, have mercy on us.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Lenten Midweek 4

## Jesse's Tree

Psalm 80:8–19 (antiphon v 19); Isaiah 6:1–13; 10:33–11:16

During Advent, First Presbyterian Church in Tyler, Texas, hangs on its lectern a dramatic purple parament depicting the stump of Jesse blossoming with a bloom resembling a lily. In our Second Reading tonight, you heard reference to a “shoot” and a “branch” from the “stump” and “roots” of Jesse (sometimes translated a “rod” from the “stem” or “stock” of Jesse). Jesse, of course, was King David’s father. Based in part on a Latin translation, some even extend the figure of speech to make the stem to be the Virgin Mary and to make her flower (sometimes “bloom” or “rose”) to be Christ.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, that lectern parament presents a striking image of the “Jesse Tree” that we focus on in this fourth sermon of our special Lenten series themed “Living among the Bible’s Trees.”

Considering Jesse’s Tree, We Realize That, Though We, like the People of Judah and Jerusalem, Are Laden with Iniquity, Jesus, the Shoot and Branch of Jesse, Comes Forth and Conquers for Us.

## **I. We, like the people of Judah and Jerusalem, are laden with iniquity.**

In our First Reading, we heard God call Isaiah to proclaim a message of judgment against Judah and its capital Jerusalem at the hands of the Assyrians. Their land, Isaiah was to tell them, would be burned, like a tree reduced to a stump. But all hope was not lost, for the holy seed was in that stump. The stump might appear to be dead, but it was not dead; suckers (new shoots) could sprout from its roots. In the Book of Job, for example, we find this contrast of such a tree to a person who dies and is laid low: “For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put out branches like a young plant” (Job 14:7–9).

So, not surprisingly, in the Second Reading, as Isaiah proclaims a message of judgment against the Assyrians and the start of new life for God’s people, Isaiah returns to the image of the stump in order to prophesy ultimately of the long-promised Messiah. In short, judgment was necessary, but all hope for the future was not eliminated.

Judgment was necessary, as you might know or expect or guess, because the people of Judah and Jerusalem, especially their kings, had been unfaithful to God. Isaiah rebukes their many sins, but he especially addresses their idolatry, their worshiping false gods. Perhaps striking to our ears when successive generations are less and less “churched,” God, through Isaiah, calls Judah children whom he reared and brought up who rebelled against him. He calls them a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring (or “seed”) of evildoers, children who deal corruptly, who had forsaken the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, and were utterly estranged. Through Isaiah, God says that an ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib, but his people did not know or understand (Is 1:2–4).

We are no different by nature, and all too often we are no different by thought, word, or deed, omitted or committed. We fail to fear, love, and trust God above all things, and so we misuse his name; we despise preaching and his Word in its verbal and sacramental forms; we disobey our parents and other authorities; we do not help and support our neighbors in every physical need; we do not lead sexually pure and decent lives; we do not help our neighbors to improve and protect their possessions and income; we do not explain everything in the kindest way; and we are not content with the possessions,

people, and animals that God has given us. We deserve not only the sort of temporal punishment God through Isaiah promised Judah and Jerusalem, but we also deserve eternal torment in hell.

In another agricultural figure of speech, that of a vine, our Psalm (Ps 80:8–19) recounts the Lord’s favored regard for Israel and its kings until the people’s unfaithfulness prompted God to let them suffer—as part of his enabling call for them to repent. And as part of an answer to that enabling call to repent, the psalm pleads for the Lord to favor the king again and restore the people that they may call upon his name and be saved. We made the psalm’s words our words! We rightly confess our sin not only on Sundays and Wednesdays during this penitential season of Lent but also every day of every season. For, when we confess our sin and trust God to forgive our sin, then God does just that: he forgives our sin, all our sin, whatever our sin might be, for the sake of his Son, Jesus the Christ, the Shoot that comes forth from the stump of Jesse, the Branch from his roots that bears fruit.

## **II. Jesus, the Shoot and Branch of Jesse, comes forth and conquers for us.**

By the time of the birth of Jesus, that royal line of David, the son of Jesse, seemed long dormant and dead. Yet, whether traced to the Virgin Mary, Jesus’ mother, or Joseph, Jesus’ legal father, Jesus descended from David (Lk 3:23–38; Mt 1:1–17). As Isaiah prophesies elsewhere, Jesus grew up like a young plant, a root out of dry ground, of humble origins and an unlikely prospect for success (Is 53:2). Yet, far greater than Solomon or any other king (Mt 12:42), Jesus is Jesse and David’s key descendant, who epitomizes all that the Lord promised to David (2 Sam 7:1–17). Out of his great love for us, the whole triune God at Jesus’ Baptism is involved in anointing him for his work, with what is called the sevenfold gift of the Spirit. Jesus was and is the promised Savior (Acts 13:22–23). Jesus is the holy Seed of the woman, who on the cross bruises the serpent’s head to defeat him, though there the serpent bruises his heel to strike him dead for a time (Gen 3:15). The Root of David has conquered (Rev 5:5; cf 22:16), and he has conquered for us! As we with repentance and faith rally around him who stands as a signal for the people, we are forgiven, and so we participate in his kingdom of peace and righteousness.

In the First Reading, Isaiah knew that he was undone in the presence of the King, the Lord of hosts, because he was a man of unclean lips who dwelled in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Yet, one of the seraphim touched Isaiah’s

mouth with a burning coal taken from the altar and so took away his guilt and atoned for his sin. Similarly, we who are sinful by nature can only stand in the presence of the Holy God by virtue of his first atoning for our sin on the cross and then giving us that forgiveness through his Word—the Word read and preached and sacramentally administered to us individually in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion. In Holy Communion, the body and blood of Christ are present on this altar in bread and wine, distributed by me and received for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And then, as Isaiah’s service followed, so our service follows. Not all are called and sent as Isaiah was, but all have callings (vocations) in life. In those, we, drawing on the rich provision of God’s grace, do the good works prescribed by his Commandments. In other words, abiding in him the Vine, we branches bear much fruit (Jn 15:5), ultimately bringing glory to God the Father as our good works lead others to hope in the Root of Jesse (Jn 15:8; Rom 15:12). And though we die and be laid low, on the Last Day we will be made alive again! *Considering Jesse’s tree, we realize that, though we, like the people of Judah and Jerusalem, are laden with iniquity, Jesus, the Shoot and Branch of Jesse, comes forth and conquers for us.*

Depictions of the “Jesse Tree” go back at least to the eleventh century, and those depictions are said to be the origin of representations of other family trees.<sup>18</sup> Jesse’s tree often has Jesse lying on his back and a vine or tree growing out of his loins; symbols or depictions of various people in the line of descent are attached to the tree, and the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus usually appear at the top.<sup>19</sup> Similar is the portion of the “Jesse Tree” window from the cathedral in Chartres, France. We thank and praise God for bringing forth our new life from Jesse’s seemingly dead stump, and, with expectant hope and peace and joy, we look forward to God fully and completely fulfilling the prophecy through Isaiah, by gathering his dispersed people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (Mk 13:27). Amen.

## **OFFERING**

**SERIES HYMN**    “Among the Bible’s Trees”    [Tune: LSB 595]

Among the Bible’s trees we live. How true they grow, as well they should.  
From them may we this Lententide Learn how our Lord died for our good.

A stump alone from Jesse's tree Decried all Israel's wandering.  
Yet God the Lord looked on in love And promised that a Branch would  
spring.

Though burdened we with sinfulness, By David's Son our battle's done.  
Through Baptism, grafted to that tree, In Christ our dreadful warfare's won.

Lord Jesus Christ, God's only Son, Whose body hung on Calv'ry's Tree,  
O living Word, Your sacrifice Pardon proclaims eternally.

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## **PRAYER OF THE CHURCH**

**Pastor:** Let us pray for the Church here and around the world, and for people everywhere in their various needs.

For everyone weighed down by their bondage to sin and an inability to stop sinning by thought, word, and deed, let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **For the sake of Christ's sacrifice on the tree of the cross, heavenly Father, open their ears to hear the Gospel anew; free them to live before You in Your kingdom.**

**Pastor:** For everyone who has fallen prey to society's distorted morality, let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **For the sake of Christ's sacrifice on the tree of the cross, heavenly Father, surround them with faithful and caring members of the Body of Christ; call them back in repentance and hope.**

**Pastor:** For those who keep the peace at home or are deployed abroad, for those who provide care and guidance in relationships, finances, and health, and for those who respond to natural disasters and crises of various sorts, let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **For the sake of Christ's sacrifice on the tree of the cross, heavenly Father, accompany them with Your Holy Spirit; protect them from harm, and give them wisdom in all circumstances.**

**Pastor:** For ourselves and the Church around the world as we seek to produce true spiritual fruit, let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **For the sake of Christ’s sacrifice on the tree of the cross, heavenly Father, assure us that we are Your pleasant planting; forgive our errors and send us to serve in faithfulness and love.**

**Pastor:** These and any other things You would have us ask, heavenly Father, grant to us for the sake of the sufferings and death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**People:** **Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(Matthew 6:9–13)*

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen**

### **BENEDICTION**

**Pastor:** The blessing of God Almighty—who created you, forgave all your sins, and strengthens you for service in His kingdom—be upon you now and forever.

**People:** **Amen.**

**HYMN**            “Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go”            [LSB 920]