
New Life When We Are Stumped

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Second Sunday of Advent – Year A**

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots. (Is 11:1)*

Don't worry. All you need is a stump.

That's all you might have left, sometimes.

Sometimes, everything else has been cut away. Even slashed away.

Sometimes, it feels like John the Baptist has taken a hold of you with his axe, with that axe that he envisioned. Sometimes it feels like John the Baptist has started cutting up around you. He said he was cutting away the chaff. He said he was taking an axe to the tree.

Maybe it was him. Maybe it was not. Maybe it was the one who would come after him. Maybe it was the One who baptizes in the spirit, and with fire. Maybe He was the one who burned things out of you that you would rather not have had burned away.

At any rate, there are days when we feel like all we are is a stump. Sometimes, we feel like all we have left is a stump of something. It's a low feeling. We are stumped. We are stubble.

Those are the days when we need the prophet Isaiah!

In Isaiah's time, his country and his people were disintegrating. He realized that all that was left of God's holy people was a stump. And, yet, he said, Don't despair.

The days will come, said Isaiah, when a shoot will grow out of the stump. A branch will shoot out of the stump of Jesse. The God of Isaiah promised that something is about to grow. Something is about to be renewed.

Today, our God is still the God of Isaiah, the God who renews, the God who brings forth life out of what looked like it was dead.

Can you remember, with me, what our world was like two years ago, when our church was meeting in the throes of Covid, and we were scared? We were cautious. We were careful about showing up. Only a few of us gathered in December two years ago. We were a remnant. We were small. Everything had been cut away.

But we persevered. We held on. We gathered. We nurtured the remnant, the stump, whatever it was we had left. We nurtured it and paid attention to what was still alive. With that nurture, the seed began to grow again.

And what has emerged is renewed life. People are flocking to our church. And people are flourishing in diversity.

Isaiah said that what looked barren would become fertile and alive. Isaiah said that what looked like violent antagonism would be made peaceful. Enemies like lions and lambs would lie down together. Cows and bears. Leopards and kids. A peaceable kingdom.

Can you imagine that? Life-long antagonists living in peace with one another? Antagonists like right-wingers

and left-wingers living at peace with one another? Rabid conservatives and flaming liberals living in peace with one another?

Maybe we are not there yet. But that sure is the vision I live for. And I hope it is the vision you live for. I hope it is the vision of everyone who prays and sings in this beautiful church today, the day of the Annual Parish Meeting of the Cathedral of St. Philip.

We are not there, yet. We are not yet living completely in Isaiah's peaceable kingdom. Maybe no one is there yet. But we sure are living into it.

Every time we nurture a seed, a shoot, from the root of Jesse, we are building a peaceable kingdom. And, my Lord, this world needs a peaceable kingdom.

Thank you. Thank you for not letting a stump remain a stump. Thank you for not giving up when it seems like everything around you has been cut away. You — each and every one of you — you are never too small when you have the Spirit of God dwelling inside you. And we — all of us together—we are never too small when we have the Spirit of God dwelling inside us.

Today, that Spirit of God is in us, resting in us. And we have the potential to grow into a living tree, a Jesse tree you might call it, full of life, and full of life in all of life's diversity. Calves and children and snakes and lions and lambs all living peaceably together. Yes,

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

*...for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. (Is 11:1–9).*

Yes, the spirit of the Lord shall rest on us,
...And the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.

AMEN.