

Abundant hope, Peace, and joy in believing

Isaiah 11, Roman 15, Matthew 3

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

What are your hopes and dreams? For this world? For our nation? For our congregation? For your life? A time without war. A time where civil discourse takes over among politicians. A congregation that prays without ceasing and gets into God's Word daily. A peace that passes all earthly understanding that brings unceasing joy in my life. These just came off the top of my head. Maybe yours are similar.

I suspect some of Isaiah's listeners had similar hopes and dreams. When Isaiah came on the scene and received God's call to preach to the children of Israel, the nation had declined from the glory days of Jesse's son, King David, and David's son King Solomon's. The nation of Israel was like a great forest of great trees with strong branches in those days if you can picture that. The people had just about whatever they needed and desired. As Isaiah preached God's Word, Israel still had the outward appearance that looked grand and glorious. But inwardly the people's sin led to decay and rot. By the end of the God's thus saith the Lord that Isaiah would preach, Israel, this grand forest will look like a clear-cut forest. Only the stumps will remain. It would look like a vast wilderness.

In Isaiah 11, the prophet brings the gospel of God. In this wilderness of stumps remains one holy stump where the holy seed will sprout. **"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from His roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him."** Whenever Israel anointed a new king, it was said that God's Spirit rested upon that king to give him counsel in their reign. But this one who comes from the holy seed of Jesse's stump will receive the sevenfold spirit of God, **"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord,"** and joy in God's presence. The last one comes from the Septuagint and has been brought forward in our baptismal and confirmation service.

This one, from Jesse's stump will begin to restore the paradise that was lost in the fall in the Garden of Eden. Where the wolf and lambs will dwell together, lion and fatted calf will live together in peace, and the young child will lead them. Where cow and bear graze in the same field and the cow is not harmed. The baby child playing over the cobra's hole and the child placing the hand in the adder's den and no harm will come to either child. This world that Isaiah describes a world as God intended. This new king is to be greater than David or Solomon. Earthly kings are chosen, but this king will draw all people to himself where they will live with the peace of God.

That is the peace of God and the joy that I long for and hope for, in this world, in our nation, in our church, and in my life. Especially during this time of the year we hear the songs of the peace and joy of Christmas. But deep down we know this peace and joy and good will toward men comes up short. We know that all is not right with the world, the nation, even in the church, and my life and your life because of the sins in lives that disrupts this peace and joy. And many, myself find myself in a wilderness, feeling spiritually dry, wondering about God's presence. Searching for the fulfillment of peace and joy in the things and wealth of this world, but find it

not lasting. We might go to church, or have alone time, to focus on Christ and his forgiveness, but back to our lives again with hectic schedules, making the budget stretch, and work problems, and conflicts with others.

The people when John the Baptist came on the scene had the same problem as we. It is in such a wilderness John the Baptist appears as a voice crying out to prepare for the coming one from Jesse's stump with call to repent for the **"Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"**. To do that John calls for them to receive the baptism repentance for the forgiveness of sins. What do you think happened after they went home? Did their lives get miraculously better? Well, my guess, like us they found that the same old problems back home did not go away, hectic schedules, budget problems, problems at work, like us that same old struggle with sin was alive and well. They needed someone mightier. We need the same one who is mightier too. And this is who John is pointing us to this morning.

He is the one from the Holy seed of Jesse's stump who can create in us a clean heart and give us the gift we need. The one mighty enough to be born as a helpless baby given the name of Jesus. The one mighty enough to hang on a cross for our salvation by separating the good fruit of our lives from the useless chaff. The mighty one who goes even further than second and third chances offering you and me the peace and joy of endless forgiveness so that you have His peace and joy not just this time of the year but all year long.

Yes, we really do need that clean heart. He gives us the gift of daily repentance confessing our sins and receiving this endless forgiveness daily by returning to our baptism. We need more of His Word, and More of His Supper, especially more of Jesus who brings to us the gift of His love, peace, and joy.

If that is what you are hoping for and dreaming for Jesus is the only one who can give it to you. Jesus of the manger, Jesus of the cross who bore your sins in order to save you. The Jesus who rose from the dead for you to give the peace of the certain hope of everlasting life. He came once and accomplished these promises and continues to come giving us these gifts. He has promised He will come again as the fulfillment of His love, peace, and joy for you. In fact, when he comes again as Isaiah preached, this peace and harmony will be so great and full that the wolf and lambs will dwell together, the lion and fatted calf will live together in peace...Where cow and bear graze in the same field and the cow is not harmed. The baby child playing over the cobra's hole and the child placing the hand in the adder's den and no harm will come to the child. Just the way things were at the beginning.

If this is your hope and dream, Keep on praying for it, keep turning to Christ in repentance, and confessing your sins. And even now Our Lord is continuing this work for you forgiving you. That we can live in peace and harmony with one another. And even **now "the God of Hope will fill you with all joy and peace in believing."** Believing not what could be. Believing in what is and will be when Christ comes again.

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.