

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 12.04.2016

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 11:1-10

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²*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. ³ His delight shall be in the **fear of the Lord**. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and **A LITTLE CHILD** shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Matthew 3:1-12

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ **IN THOSE DAYS** John the Baptist appeared in the **wilderness** of Judea, proclaiming, ² **“REPENT**, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the **wilderness**: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” ⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

The exact relationship between the Book of Isaiah is one of the great prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures. “The context for [today's] oracle is the difficult period of tensions around the Syro-Ephraimitic war in 733 BCE when the northern kingdom of Israel and the Arameans of Damascus tried to force Judah and King Ahaz to join their rebellion against Assyria. On Isaiah's advice, Ahaz refused; but then, instead of joining the rebel alliance, he called Assyria to intervene. This they did with devastating impact, eventually leading to the destruction of Samaria and the end of the northern kingdom in 721 BCE. Isaiah objected to this dangerous move by Ahaz, but he was hopeful that the young Hezekiah who would follow Ahaz [as king] might be the righteous Davidic ruler long hoped for. This hopeful passage may reflect that rising hope in Hezekiah as God's righteous king (v. 1-5, 10) ushering in the peaceable kingdom (v 6-9).”
from *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol 1

This is one of three passages in Isaiah that are thought to refer to the Messiah to come. “Messiah” means “anointed one,” a title that was used of Israel's monarchs. The first two passages express a more immediate vision of the messianic advent (Isaiah 7:14-16 & 9:2-7) whereas this passage indicates a growing sense that the Messiah might be in the future, beyond the lifetime of the prophet. The vision of a peaceable kingdom in verses 6-9, point to the final consummation, the ultimate realization of God's kingdom plan, not something Isaiah probably expected to see with his own eyes. He prophesies from a stance of waiting, between what is & of what he hopes.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him:: what distinguishes this King as the Messiah is the presence, purpose and guiding power of the Spirit of God. Both Saul and David immediately received God's spirit when they were anointed by the prophet Samuel as king in 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13. Is this similar? Or different to their anointing?

fear of the Lord :: “fear” here means more of respect, reverence than an idea of terror. This is an expression used to describe those who are obedient and follow God's leading throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.

A LITTLE CHILD :: are we to understand this as a future coming, or not yet born, king? Does this point to the baby Jesus?

IN THOSE DAYS :: The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all start with a description of the ministry of John the Baptizer. Curiously this expression in Matthew refers neither to a specific date or time, nor to what happened at the of chapter of 2. Could it be that Matthew is employing an eschatological expression (such as “in the last days” or “days to come” in Isaiah 2:2, placing the beginning of the gospel account in that specific biblical context.

⁸Bear fruit worthy of **REPENT**ance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have **ABRAHAM AS OUR ANCESTOR**’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹‘I baptize you with water for **REPENT**ance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Romans 15:1-13

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” ⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have **hope**. ⁴For whatever was written **IN FORMER DAYS** was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have **hope**.

⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, *therefore*, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”; ¹⁰and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”; ¹¹and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”; ¹²and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall **hope**.”

¹³May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

wilderness :: the Greek word used here means both desert and wilderness. Biblically speaking it refers to the space that is outside of the power and control of humanity. It's in opposition to the city or town. It's where one must depend upon God. It points to the wandering deliverance of the Israelites after leaving Egypt. It was the space into which all prophets went to commune with God and receive a prophetic word or vision.

REPENT :: the Greek word is “metanoia” which literally means to turn around 180° and go in the opposite direction of the one in which you're walking. It's more than apologizing for wrongdoing. It's a radical re-orientation of how life is lived and its purpose.

ABRAHAM AS OUR ANCESTOR :: John is challenging the theological assumption that salvation is based upon genetics or ancestry. Are the people of God defined by demographics or ethics. He wasn't unique in his thought, but it did challenge the fundamental assumption of what it mean to be the chosen people of God.

Romans is the pastoral letter of theological advice written by Paul to the emerging church in Ancient Rome in the 1st century CE. It's considered the highpoint of his theological description and development of the Way of Jesus.

IN FORMER DAYS:: this again is a vague time, not pointing to a specific season or year, but suggesting a new thing which breaks with all of what came before.

Hope :: is the word most repeated in the text. Throughout the text the implication is made that “unless there is trust in God, there can be no hope; but unless God is faithful, there can be no trust. It is therefore the faithfulness of God, demonstrated in Christ, upon which our hope is based.

Therefore :: introduces the concluding paragraph and climactic conclusion of this part of the book of Romans, summarizing all that has been said in Romans 14:1-15:6. The language seems to echo that of Philippians 2:5-13, in which Paul speaks of unity. Hope seems to be the key for unity among Jews and Gentiles, past and present, present and future as it's possible because God controls the future and has given a glimpse of that [eschatological future] by sending the Christ. from *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol 1., pp.41-43.

Questions for the Practice of Examen & Contemplation

These three scriptures point to a hope that is in the future and already being realized in the present. A hope that only God can make happen. A hope for all peoples. What hope does trust in God give you? How does it shape your life? Your actions? Your relationships?

Advent falls in the winter solstice, the days of the least light – symbolically the hardest in which to have hope. How are you struggling to have hope? Talk to God about your need for hope that is muscular, concrete, activating and palpable.