

THE SERMON

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Journey to the Manger
Roots of Righteousness

Isaiah 11:1-10

Beloved Church, I am sure that many of us have spent some time in contact with nature in a forest. I recall my time in a forest near Portland, Oregon, in 2008, as well as my childhood in Valdivia, in southern Chile. These are places where the majestic beauty of those giant trees makes us feel small and often insignificant in the face of God's creation.

Therefore, let me begin this second sermon of Advent with a story from nature. Imagine walking through a forest after a storm. You see mighty trees, some standing tall, others fallen. What makes the difference? Often, it's not the height or the spread of the branches, but the roots beneath the surface. The strongest trees

are those with deep, healthy roots; roots that anchor, nourish, and sustain them through every season.

In the world of **dendrology**, the scientific study of trees, experts inform us that a tree's visible beauty is only possible because of the invisible work of its roots. Roots draw water and nutrients, provide stability, and even communicate with other trees through underground networks. In the same way, our lives, our character, our faith, and our hope are shaped by the roots we cultivate. Today, as we continue our journey to the manger, we turn to Isaiah's vision of a righteous branch springing from the stump of Jesse, and we ask: ***What does it mean to have roots of righteousness?***

If you remember the reading of **Isaiah 11:1-10**, it paints a picture of hope in the midst of despair. Israel, like a tree cut down, seemed finished. Yet Isaiah proclaims, "***A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse; and a branch shall grow out of his roots.***" Out of what looked dead, God promises new life—a Messiah who will bring justice, peace, and restoration.

This prophecy is not just about a distant future; it's about God's ongoing work to bring hope where there is hopelessness, to restore what is broken, and to plant seeds of righteousness in the soil of our lives and communities.

As we journey to the manger this Advent, we remember that the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise. Jesus is the righteous Branch, rooted in God's faithfulness, who comes to bring justice for the poor, equity for the meek, and peace that surpasses understanding.

However, Isaiah's vision also presents a challenge. The peaceable kingdom he describes, where the wolf lives with the lamb, and a little child leads them, is not just a future hope. It is a call to let the roots of righteousness grow in us now, shaping how we live, love, and serve.

So, the question here is, ***how do we cultivate these roots of righteousness as we prepare for Christ's arrival?*** What is the central theme of Advent?

So, let me offer three challenging suggestions, drawn from Isaiah's imagery of the roots and the journey to the manger:

First, nourish your roots with God's Word and prayer.

Just as roots draw nourishment from the soil, we must draw strength from God's Word and prayer. Advent is a season of waiting and preparation, as we reflected last Sunday.

So, the invitation is to set aside time each day to read scripture, reflect, and pray. Let the story of Jesus' coming take root deeply in your heart. Ask God to reveal areas where your roots need to grow deeper, such as in patience, forgiveness, or trust.

You are probably saying to yourself, "*pastor, but I do that. I read my Bible daily and I pray.*" Well, this is great, but do it with intention during this season of Advent.

So, let me challenge you this week. Sermons are intended to challenge us, to take us out of our comfort zone, and to make us uncomfortable. My invitation to you is to commit to a daily practice of scripture reading and prayer. But read today's text during the coming six days.

Pastor, are you asking us to read the exact text over and over? Yes, and write down in a notebook or journal how this text speaks to you each day; yes, the same Bible text. So, let it shape your thoughts and actions. At the end of the week, you will see how God spoke to you through the exact text in a different way.

If you're not familiar with this, this is what I do when preparing a sermon: I read the Bible text multiple times so that the Lord can speak to me through it. And let me tell you, sometimes what I get can easily be

seven different sermons. So, try it and be challenged to do this exercise. You will be blessed by doing it.

The second challenging suggestion that I would like to offer is **to practice justice and mercy in your relationships.**

Isaiah's vision is one of justice for the poor and equity for the meek. Righteousness is not just personal piety; it is lived out in how we treat others.

As we journey to the manger, let us examine our relationships. Our relationship with family, neighbors, coworkers, and strangers. ***Are we agents of justice and mercy?*** Do we speak up for those who are overlooked? Do we forgive as we have been forgiven?

So, the challenge for us is to identify one relationship or situation where you can practice justice or mercy this week. Perhaps it's reaching out to someone in need, advocating for fairness, or offering forgiveness in the face of hurt.

Please, don't just wait for a situation; look for it. You need to look around and see the many opportunities God offers us to practice means of grace through works of mercy. Perhaps, you don't need to go so far to offer forgiveness.

The third and final challenging suggestion that I would like to offer today is **to cultivate peace in a divided world.**

Isaiah's peaceable kingdom is a radical vision, one in which predators and prey coexist, as illustrated by the wolf and the lamb, led by a child. In a world marked by division, conflict, and fear, we are called to be peacemakers. This doesn't mean avoiding difficult conversations or pretending differences don't exist. It means seeking understanding, listening with compassion, and working for reconciliation.

I know, many times we feel overwhelmed by what we watch in the news, or what we read or hear. But nobody is asking you to run for the Nobel Peace Prize. And solve the wars and conflicts of the world. Instead of that, be a peacemaker in your own context.

So, here comes the final challenge: ***Where do you see division...in your family, workplace, or community?***

Take one step toward peace this week. It might be a conversation, an act of kindness, or a prayer for someone with whom you disagree. Even a smile in a hard moment can be an act of peace.

My friends, the journey to the manger is not a solitary path. We walk together as a community, supporting

one another as we grow, just as trees in a forest share resources through their roots. They are even interconnected.

Therefore, we are called to encourage, challenge, and care for one another. When one of us is struggling, the rest can offer support. When one rejoices, all can celebrate.

Let us be a church where the roots of righteousness run deep. Let us be a church where hope is nurtured. Let us be a church where justice is practiced and peace is pursued. As we prepare our hearts for Christ's arrival, may we become a living testimony to the restoration God promises through the Messiah.

Beloved, the stump of Jesse reminds us that God is not finished with us, no matter how barren or broken things may seem. The shoot that springs forth is a sign of God's faithfulness. It is a promise that new life is possible. As we journey to the manger, let us open our hearts to the roots of righteousness God wants to plant in us.

May we be people who draw deeply from God's love, who practice justice and mercy, and who cultivate peace in our world. And as we do, may we bear fruit

that brings hope and restoration to all. So, let us continue the journey to the manger. Let us pray

God of Advent, as we journey to the manger during this season, plant in us the roots of righteousness. Nourish us with your Word, strengthen us by your Spirit, and help us to practice justice, mercy, and peace. May our lives reflect the hope and restoration promised through your Son, Jesus Christ. Prepare our hearts for his coming and make us a community where your love grows deep and strong. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.