

## Sermon points 27/11/2022

### Jesse Tree Week 1 – Hope

#### The Jesse Tree

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The word advent means coming or arrival, and at Christmas we celebrate Jesus' first advent, while also preparing for the second advent, Jesus' return.

This year, we're going to be following a Jesse Tree. A Jesse Tree is an ancient way of portraying Jesus' family line and was often used in art to teach the faith. One of the oldest intact depictions of a Jesse Tree is in Chartres, France and it's 900 years old.

The big idea stems from a verse in Isaiah 11:1 which says:

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

Jesse was the father of Israel's greatest ruler – King David. God promised David that his royal line would last forever. Jesus came from this royal line. He is the branch and fulfilment of God's promise in Isaiah. Each story represents a step-in salvation history and lets us examine a thread in the rich tapestry that is Jesus' family tree.

So each Sunday in Advent, we're going to go on a whistle stop tour of the Jesse Tree symbols. Today we're going to look at:

Creation and Fall, Sin and Judgement, our God who won't give up.

#### Creation and Fall

The roots of our Jesse Tree start at the very beginning which is a very good place to start: Creation and Fall.

In the beginning, God creates a good world. In six days, God separates light from darkness, sky from water, land from sea. He creates the sun and the moon, birds to fly in the sky and fish to swim in the sea, and on the sixth day he creates animals to flourish on land. There is order and wonder in creation. If you've ever watched a good nature documentary, you've experienced this awe.

One of the things I love about the Genesis account of creation is how God congratulates himself. He creates something, then it says: *and God saw that it was good*. God the Father creates the world by his Word (the Son), through the Holy Spirit and there is this beautiful inner dialogue of affirmation and love. God is creativity and love.

And at the pinnacle of creation God creates something that's very good. Genesis 1:27 says:

*“God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)*

God creates us (both women and men) in His image. Creative, relational, and loving. He gifts us with personhood, something that nothing else in creation has.

And so, it's a tragedy when, in the very next chapter of the Bible, the people God creates betray him. God creates an awesome world, and in a perfect location he plants a garden where he puts the first people Adam and Eve.

Now there's no love without risk and so God gives Adam the garden to enjoy with one condition: do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve then comes on the scene to compliment Adam, so together they might thrive.

Now God stands for spiritual goodness in the world, but forces of evil soon enter the story. A tempter comes in the form of a snake who gets in Eve's ear and convinces her to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam's right there but he's passive. Eve falls in love with the lie that eating the fruit will make her as powerful as God, and Adam falls for the idea that if I just take the path of least resistance, it'll be okay.

The fall is a reminder that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. It's part of the answer to why a good God would allow suffering in this world.

The hope in this part of the Jesse Tree is found in the fact that God doesn't end humanity here. All is not lost, and God graciously sacrifices an animal to make clothes for Adam and Eve to ease their shame. He puts them outside the garden but makes an amazing promise. He says to Satan (the tempter):

*“I will make you and the woman enemies to each other.  
Your children and her children will be enemies.  
You will bite her child's foot,  
but he will crush your head.”  
(Genesis 3:15)*

It's a glimmer of hope but it's something we can cling to. I strike your heel and it's game on but you crush my head and it's game over. One day someone, a child from Eve's line, will crush the head of evil. Even among the wreckage there is hope.

## Sin and Judgement

Now before we get too chipper, we need to recognise that the Bible isn't a fairy tale. It's real about who we are as people and doesn't sugar coat history.

Adam and Eve have children: Cain and Abel. Abel is a shepherd and Cain a farmer. Both offer sacrifices to God but Cain's heart isn't in the right place, so God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's. Cain gets angry. Even though God warns Cain to master his anger, he goes ahead and kills his brother.

In one generation we go from eating forbidden fruit to murder. Here we see there aren't degrees of sin, just different shades of black.

But again, God doesn't give up on us. Cain is given a mark of protection and Adam and Eve have another son, Seth. Through his line the Jesse Tree continues.

Sadly, the downward spiral cascades from Adam through nine generations to Noah.

In Noah's day the world becomes so wicked and violent that Genesis 6:6 says:

*"The LORD was sorry that he had made people on the earth. It made him very sad in his heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy all the people I created on the earth. I will destroy every person and every animal and everything that crawls on the earth. And I will destroy all the birds in the air, because I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:6-7)*

Like a loving parent, God is cut to the heart about what his children do to each other.

The tree is cut and humanity is done and dusted but no! v.8 says:

*"But Noah pleased the LORD"*

One person still loves God and lives for him. The thread of salvation history could not be thinner but while there's still someone like Noah there's hope. (Pause)

Loving God involves living for him. God tells Noah to build an Ark one and a half football fields long and as high as a six story building.

Fun fact: The Ark is six times as long as it is wide, a ratio still used by shipbuilders today.

The Ark is an act of mercy: Noah and his family weren't perfect but they had a relationship with God. For 40 days and 40 nights the rains come down. 40 is a symbol of cleansing in the Bible. Then Noah floats in hope for 150 days waiting for the Lord to make the waters drop.

Finally, they do drop, and the Ark runs aground. The animals and people are set free on a renewed earth, ready for a fresh start. God makes a promise with Noah never to flood the world again and puts a rainbow in the sky as a reminder of this promise. Noah and his family in turn offer sacrifices to the Lord.

It's a scene brimming with hope as the Jesse Tree continues. Sin brings judgement, yet judgement brings hope.

### **A God who won't give up**

Again and again, people are failing each other and God, but as the hymn says: our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

The generations after Noah again draw away from God. So God calls Abram. Abram is wandering the desert, an old man who has been successful in business but has failed to start a family. He's walking around the desert basically waiting to die with no legacy to leave or purpose to live out.

But God appears to him and says in Genesis 12:11:

*"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

*"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

(Genesis 12:1-3)

The God of the Bible is a creative, relational, and promise making person. Abram is 75 years and still living with mum and dad, but God is going to use him powerfully.

God promises Abram three things he yearns for: land, family, and blessings.

Ultimately the Bible talks about God's goal for us as becoming God's people, in God's place, under God's rule. God promises that through Abram's seed all people across the earth will be blessed.

Abram is obedient to God and goes where God tells him, but he will have to wait many years before he sees these dreams come true. There are many

ups and downs and times when Abram and his wife nearly give up, but they stick it out.

At one point in the story God takes Abram out and shows him the night sky and reminds him of his promises to bless him so he might be a blessing.

And this is where we'll leave the Jesse Tree for today. This beautiful top down, systematic way of looking at God's ultimate rescue plan is glorious and intricate. There are 24 movements in the Jesse Tree journey, and while we've only looked at some of these this morning, we can begin to clearly trace how the God of all creation has created an ordered, logical and beautiful story of redemption that can ground us in the assurance of the knowledge of God's love for us.

Never once does God give up on his creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, or Abram and Sarah. Nor does he ever give up on us. I hope you'll take the devotional with you today and begin looking at these stories in detail day by day.

For now, I just want to remind you that even in the darkest times there is hope. Stars shine brightest when the sky is blackest. Among all the pain, frustration, and sorrow of the world we must keep looking up to the stars and remembering our God is a God who won't give up. His redemptive plans may not make sense to us all the time but perhaps they don't need to. Perhaps when we're most faithful to him, he can work most powerfully through us.

Let's keep trusting in God, let's keep putting our hope in him. Let's take our place in the Jesse Tree.