

Sunday Thought

4th December 2022 Second Sunday of Advent

Readings

Isaiah 11:1 - 10

Psalms 72: 1 - 7, 18 - 19

Romans 15: 4 - 13

Matthew 3: 1 - 12

Look for New Shoots

Continuing the Advent theme today, Isaiah speaks again about the coming Messiah-King. His opening words remind me of a prose poem by Alexander Solzenhitzyn - *The Elm Log*. It relates how he and fellow prisoners in the labour camp had felled an Elm Tree for next year's winter fuel. A year later, when they came to saw it into pieces, one elm log had sprouted a fresh green shoot. 'We



could not bring the saw to bite into it,' he wrote. *'We could not give up. That log's urge to live was even stronger than ours.'* Equally so, the prophet's longing ache that *'The royal line of Jesse's son, King David, like a tree felled by its enemies, will live and grow again!* The Lord had assured him, *'There will be a new King! A new day! A new Kingdom of God!' The Promises have not died,*' Isaiah trustingly claims. *'Our descendants shall live to see them fulfilled!'*

He goes on to describe the wonderful reign which God has promised his people. It will be a rule of rich, spirit-filled wisdom and knowledge when honouring the Lord, his people will live obedient to his laws and trusting his words. The reign will be marked by divine justice, with sincere goodness and with pure morality. All people will know God and honour him. The poor, the weak and the unfairly treated will be his special care. Above all else he will bring to the whole world a reign of Peace. Thinking of Isaiah's images it takes a great deal to imagine a pack of wolves running alongside a flock of contented sheep with the wolves having no thought of *'what's for breakfast?'*, but by God's grace I can look at the world of conflict today and still dream and pray as Isaiah surely did. I watch the news for signs of the peacemakers just as I wait to see more new leafy shoots on the lightning-struck oak in the park.

The apostle Paul encourages me to dream, as he did Christians in Rome. *'Hold on to promises like Isaiah had,'* he tells them, *You have been given scriptures to encourage you in patient hope and help you be sure his Spirit will empower you as you wait for King Jesus, who is coming again.'* The King of Peace is our Advent message. We celebrate how Jesus comes to share life - mine, yours, home, church, nation, workplace ... and there He brings Peace!

The reading from Matthew's gospel today tells how that came about when all the prophetic jigsaw pieces slotted into place. Matthew is good at those scripture puzzles and reminds us how 'at that time in the world's history and politics - *God's right time!* - many things happened - Joseph had brought Mary and their son to live in Nazareth where they could reach family contacts in Jerusalem and the Temple, and where they were not very far from the Judaeian desert which many of the prophets knew well. It was to there, by the Jordan crossing John the Baptist came in his warm camel-hair coat and with his bag of honey-coated locusts, to join the long, prophetic line. John shared the same message, as most of his forerunners. *'If you want to be ready for the Christ, turn your lives around to love God and model them on his commandments.*

John's message was given equally to *common* sinners and self-righteous religious leaders - some rich law-picking Saducees and some pious Pharisees among them. They were not all happy to hear this *loud* voice in the wilderness. Their criticisms of Jesus and frequent opposition to his work would follow him for the next three years until they saw him nailed to a Roman cross from where, three days later, his Father, God raised him to life again as the true King of saving Peace.

I am grateful for Isaiah's picture of the new tree shoot. Jesus, the King of Peace, God's Son is now *God's sprouting branch* of hope for the world. The King



of Peace is now the Saviour of the Universe. As Paul reminds me again, the scriptures are still my encouragement to look for that right time when we and all people shall witness lambs snuggling up to lions - who, presumably, will now eat hay, or even those *honey-coated locusts!!* The futures of all people are in the advent dream come true. We trust in Jesus, honour him as our Lord and King, and keep looking for his *new 'Christmas branches.'*

The King of Peace.

[An Advent prayer based on Psalm 72]

God, our Father, we give thanks to you for Jesus, our Shepherd King who gave his life a sacrifice, proving your forgiving, reconciling love and giving an amazing peace for all people to know.

May Jesus' reign of peace be more firmly established today.

Teach the rulers of the world your peaceful ways,
turning weapons of war to instruments of healing;
implements for agriculture
and new means to care for your creation.

By your Holy Spirit may love and peace grow more and more day by day in our world,
while moonlight floods the skies
and the sun warms the earth.

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