



'Celebrate Messiah: Root deeply'

Second Sunday of Advent
8:30 & 10:45 am Sunday, December 4, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Grace and peace be to you from God Our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I grew up in Columbia, Pennsylvania right on the border of the Susquehanna and the house that we lived in was not too far from a meadow and just beyond the meadow was woods, and that was a place that was special to me. I would go up there by myself, I would go up there with friends, I would take my dog with me and just go up there and walk in the woods. My friends and I would build little forts in there. What was really special about it for me was just as a kid growing up, you know, not being 6'5" back in those days, but going into the woods and just looking at all those really big tall trees that we have here in Pennsylvania. The woods was such a great place, the trees were so big, they were so strong. Some of them had very, very deep roots; the white oaks, the hickory, the walnuts. Some of these root systems go twenty feet or even deeper, and they create such a great base for those trees. But when you're in the woods sometimes you'll see trees that were uprooted. Sometimes there might have been some rot, there might have been a strong wind that knocked them down, sometimes the soil isn't all that great where they happen to be. There might be a big rock just below where they are and they are not able to go as deep and as wide as they might like to do. So, there's all sorts of reasons of why the tree might be uprooted and might actually fall down.

What I love about trees is you can look at the trunk and you can see the branches and you can see the leaves, and sometimes if there it's a flowering tree you could see the beautiful flowers, but usually you never see the roots. You know the roots are under the ground, you can't seem them, and yet the root system is what hold the whole thing together, what makes the tree grow strong and grow tall, and grow beautiful.

There is a symbol in Celtic spirituality, that would be the Scottish and Irish spirituality, called the *Tree of Life*. Notice the *Tree of Life* is a great, strong tree with wide branches and deep roots. In *Tree of Life* the artist always shows the root system.

The Celts want to make sure that we understand as Christians how deep we have to go in order to be as healthy and as strong that we can possibly be.

You see, it's a scary world out there and we can come into contact with all sorts of violence, or natural disasters, or fires, or terrorism, or injustice, strained and broken relationships, abuse, or addiction. And I am concerned, I think about for my own kids,

and my children's children (when they have them) what will the future be for them? What will it be like? I think it is so important in the Christian faith to be rooted in the things of God. And that might mean that sometimes we need to be different from the world that we see, and ask ourselves, what does it mean for me as a Christian? What makes me different from the world that is around me? Maybe it's the clothes, (we can always put on some camel hair!), or maybe it's what we eat. (We're going to be starting up a locust and wild honey small group, so let me know if you'd like to be a part of that!)

Maybe it's the food, maybe it's how we dress, maybe it's how we act. Maybe it's how we want to go deeper and deeper in the faith. Now the word that the lessons lift up in particular this week, especially with John the Baptist, is the word "*repentance*." Now repentance mean "turning around." Its as if you're going down a certain pathway and you decide to turn around and go a different direction. So, a life of repentance is one that always seeks to orient oneself to God and to the things of God. So, if you find yourself going into the shadows, repentance calls you back into the light. If you find yourself going down a crooked path, repentance says no, find the straight path. If you find yourself losing faith, repentance says come back to God and seek him and he will be found. Repentance is about turning one's life around and turning toward the things of God and when we do that we hear that we will be able to bear fruit. We will bear fruit worthy of that repentance, worthy of that turning around.

Now one of the most beautiful passages we have in all of scripture talks about the bearing of fruit. Its from our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah and is used as a prayer in our baptismal ritual. The prophet is saying to the Israelites that God is going to do something new and he's going to do it by his Spirit. In other words, he's going to give the Israelites his spirit through a number of spiritual gifts. One of the gifts that he is going to give is the spirit of *wisdom*, for you and I to be able to discern the pathway that God wants us to be one. And he's going to give us the spirit of *understanding*, for us to be able to really focus our attention on the things of God. He's going to give us a spirit of *council* that will help us in our direction for life, and he's going to give us the spirit of his *might*, of his strength, to strengthen us to whatever we might go through in the world. And he'll give us the spirit of *knowledge* for spiritual growth and the spirit of the *fear of the Lord*, that idea of his basic reverence toward God. These gifts give us joy!

Now these spirits, these gifts, are things that we pray for with the baptismal candidate. It's a part of the baptismal promises and are meant to be a garment that we put on. Like for example, if you root for a sports team, you put on those garments. I see some of you have the Penn State logos, some of us are wearing "game day" socks, "Go Steelers!" We do that because it says something about us. It says something that the things that we care about, who we are, and what's important to us. We put on these garments because we want to be loyal to our sports team or we put on these spiritual garments because we want to be loyal to God.

So, that even when we're feeling cut off or even cut down because of what life throws at us, we know that life can come from death. And that strong roots can bring back new growth and bring hope for tomorrow.

My neighbor has a tree, that the tree guys basically trimmed it down to the big branches. Have you ever seen them do that? I mean I thought they were going to cut the tree down and they just stopped early. But what they do is cut all the branches out and then they allow the growth to come back again.

As we live our baptismal life, as we live a life spirit-filled and on fire for God, we live in harmony in purpose and mission and praise. We can glorify God as we welcome people and to live in the peace and joy which is in Christ. You and I can abound in hope. And the Holy Spirit makes all of this possible through the new growth that comes to us by baptism.

The German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said this, "There are two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, is wings." Roots, the traditions that we have, our Christian tradition which roots us, which helps plant us firm; but also wings, the freedom to live in Christ, and when we do that we experience God's peaceable kingdom. Edward Hicks painting the "*Peaceable Kingdom*" is an illustration of God's kingdom Isaiah envisions. This is nothing less than Eden restored. God's heavenly kingdom, God's reign, renewed and restored where animals that were formerly adversaries now live together in perfect harmony. (Just like the movie "*Zootopia*.")

God nurtures us in the faith, calls us to repentance and invites us to bear fruit for that kingdom. And so, this Advent Season, I want to invite you to celebrate your Messiah. God is imaging a future for you, a place and time of acknowledging and accepting his gifts. And so, we have the opportunity this season to go deep with God to seek to grow in the gifts of the Spirit, to worship, to learn and to serve, and to be open to the Holy Spirit of God who seeks to bring us new life even as we might be experiencing the deadness of our world. Amen

In the name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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