

## **“From Stump to Shoot: Peace That Takes Root”**

### **A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent on Isaiah 11:1–10**

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Across the world, we hear stories of the weak becoming strong and the strong becoming weak. Human history is filled with examples of power gained and power lost, and sometimes—tragically—power abused. In the Indian context, for centuries, the numerically weak but ritually strong have often dominated the numerically strong but ritually marginalized. Because of being born into privileged caste groups, some have enjoyed unearned social and cultural advantages, shaping society by weakening others.

One such story from India’s cultural history speaks of how a small caste group seized symbolic and social power through unusual ideas about what is sacred. They reversed the common power balance of creation—granting superior status to the plant world over the animal world—and used this, both literally and symbolically, in the shaping of the caste system. The prey became the predator. Vegetarianism, along with certain passive behavioral ideals, came to symbolize purity, knowledge, sacredness, and moral superiority—privileges reserved for a select few by birth. This cultural habit, crafted and preserved by the upper castes, has been celebrated for centuries and often used to maintain influence over marginalized groups. It is a

story of deception, suppression, and exploitation—a long history in which justice has rarely prevailed, and peace remains painfully absent.

Yet the story Isaiah tells is not about the strong defeating the weak, or the weak defeating the strong.

Isaiah's vision is about **level ground**, a world reordered by God. It is a vision of creation remade—of new life sprouting from what seems dead, of a world where predator and prey coexist in peace under the reign of a newborn king whose arrival we await in this Advent season.

### **The Stump and the Shoot**

We heard Isaiah's opening words: "*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse.*" Not a towering cedar, not a mighty forest—a **stump**. A stump is what remains when something strong has been cut down—when dreams collapse, when systems fail, when life is disrupted. For Israel, that stump meant exile, defeat, broken monarchy, and lost hope.

Isaiah proclaims that mighty Assyria will fall like a tree that will never sprout again. But when he looks at the house of David—also cut down—he sees something different. From David's line, from the deep roots of a seemingly lifeless stump, a **tender shoot** begins to rise. All is not lost for Judah. A second David will emerge, a king of peace and righteousness whose reign will restore justice.

Isaiah does not deny the stump. And neither should we.

Every one of us knows stump places: a fractured relationship, a diagnosis that shakes us, a spirit grown weary, a mistake that haunts us, a hope that feels permanently crushed, and a world marred by violence and division. Into these places, Isaiah whispers: **God is not done.**

### **The Peace That Seems Impossible**

We all know the iconic image of peace: a lion lying down with a lamb. It captures our imagination because it portrays the impossible becoming possible. Picture, for a moment, a rat riding on a cat, the cat riding on a dog. Or a tiger nursing piglets, a lioness adopting antelope calves. It feels bizarre—yet profoundly hopeful.

Isaiah's parade of unlikely companions—wolf with lamb, leopard with kid, calf with lion, cow with bear, children playing safely near snakes—may sound absurd. But it is meant to reawaken our imaginations. Isaiah calls Judah and calls us to picture life reordered, creation healed, relationships restored, and fear dismantled.

Today's world feels far from this vision—violence rampant, systems unjust, hopes fragile. Yet Isaiah insists: **a new righteousness is inevitable** because it is God's work, not ours. The Spirit will accomplish what humanity cannot. The promise extends beyond Judah, for God's salvation is not limited by borders or castes or kingdoms.

This Advent, we wait for the Prince of Peace—the One filled with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Hope begins in small ways, like a tiny tendril emerging from hard soil. From the stump, peace begins to take root.

### **The Surprise in Bethlehem**

Consider what the birth of this king in Bethlehem means today. He arrives unexpectedly, quietly, in poverty—yet with a stature that unsettles earthly power. The royal family tree appears dead, but from its stump emerges a king unlike any other. Our modern kings, leaders, and executives lack the depth of reverence, righteousness, and justice that this child brings.

Christ comes not to stand above the poor but **among them**—ready to confront the prosecutors, priests, rich, and powerful of today just as he did in his earthly ministry. If we want to see the promise fulfilled, we must look for Jesus where he always is: with the victimized, the marginalized, the overlooked.

**Advent is A Time to Relearn Power:** Advent invites us to examine our assumptions—especially about power. In Christ, power is transformed. It becomes self-giving, not self-protecting; restorative, not oppressive; humble, not dominating.

Isaiah's vision of predators becoming gentle is not about gaining power but relinquishing it. They become "vegetarian," not for prestige, but to abandon dominance. So why does Isaiah show us a purring lion, a calf learning to roar, a wolf wagging its tail beside a fearless lamb?

Because God calls us to stand with the vulnerable—to allow others to grow in strength by loosening our grip on privilege, wealth, authority, and control.

If Christ is coming into our world with humility, fragility, and vulnerability, then we too must choose to be born anew with him. Advent calls us to prepare our hearts for divine vulnerability joined with divine strength. May the shoot from the stump of Jesse take root in us. May peace grow where we once saw only dead stumps. And may the Prince of Peace remake our world, our communities, and our hearts. **Amen.**