

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, December 4, 2016

### **The Stump Will Sprout Again**

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

December 4, 2016

Isaiah 11:1-10

When we moved into our current home 24 years ago, it was newly constructed. We bought it for a number of reasons, not the least being the beautiful oak and hickory trees at the back of the property. We love trees but unfortunately the builder had taken several out when grading the property for construction leaving some stumps in the back yard.

You can do one of two things with stumps, have them grinded away or leave them alone. If you leave them alone, what will happen to the stumps depends on soil conditions, how the grading was done, and the type of tree. Some of the stumps, and one apparently healthy tree, were hickories which can't tolerate having earth moved over their root system. The result was that the tree and the stumps were doomed. The tree died and the stumps, in time, rotted away.

However, out in the yard beyond where it had been graded was the stump of what had been a large maple tree. That stump sprouted and produced a cluster of small maple trees. The stump was healthy and was determined to survive. Today a stand of maple trees over thirty feet tall graces our yard. Under the right conditions a stump will indeed sprout again, and our maple stump did just that with great success.

Our scripture reading from Isaiah begins, *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."*

The stump alludes to Jesse, the father of David and refers to Jesse's descendants starting with David and, while Isaiah did not realize it, it also refers to the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who was of the house and lineage of David. That stump, like the maple stump in our yard, was healthy and determined to survive, and survive it did but not without a struggle.

The scripture goes on to say referring to a king to come, *"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him --- The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and*

*might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord --- and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.”*

The dynasty of Jesse and David appeared to have ended when the Jews were exiled to Babylon and were defeated by the Assyrians, but it didn't end. The stump had sprouted and grown but was cut back, but it sprouted again.

The exile ended in about 526 BC and the Jews returned to Israel. Zerubbabel, a descendent of David became king thus restoring David's dynasty. The Romans subsequently captured Israel and the dynasty once again appeared to have ended, but the stump sprouted once again with the birth of the King of Kings, Jesus the Christ.

Even though he did not know of Jesus, Isaiah's description of the Spirit resting on the fruit of the stump is very appropriate as is his use of the word "Spirit" which we now recognize as the third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Isaiah also prophetically described how the King of Kings would rule. *“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.”*

These words are almost eerie in their description of Jesus, words that were written about 750 years before the birth of Christ. The first part of these words describes how Jesus lived his life on earth but the second part beginning *“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked”* is a description of what will happen with the second Advent.

The scripture reading continues with the statement that *“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”* Several other expressions of peace and harmony among humans and animals follow.

The Rev. Steve Lindsley at Trinity Presbyterian in Charlotte tells of a children's sermon on today's scripture passage when the children were asked what this portion of the passage meant to them. One little boy piped up, *“Well, it looks like the lion is about to have himself some dinner.”* Rev. Lindsley commented that this was exactly the point. *“Advent is that intersection where the harsh realities of the real world and the hopeful*

*promise of God's world collide. And you know what we find at this collision? We find a God who is adamant about closing the gap between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of heaven.*

*"In Advent, we find a God who wants to see that a life in Africa ... is honored every bit as much as a life anywhere. In Advent, we find a God who longs for the day when a weapon isn't fired and a missile isn't launched because there is nothing that needs to be fought over. And to think --- all of this [was] set in motion by a newborn infant in an animal stable; and a nomad baptizer who [ate] crickets and [refused] to keep his mouth shut."*

*As Isaiah said, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious."*

The stump will have sprouted for the final time and the tree will reach not 30 feet like the maple in our yard but all the way to heaven.

**Alleluia! Amen.**