

***Unwrapping Advent***  
***"Hope – It's what I always wanted!"***  
November 29, 2020

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**Isaiah:**

Isaiah is one of the Bible's most well-loved books. It is also one of its most complex works, because it reflects settings that span hundreds of years of Judean history. Some parts refer to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE when Assyria dominated the ancient Near East. Some parts refer to Babylonian times and other parts emerged deep into, if not beyond, the ear of Persian rule that began in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century.

No other prophetic book is more often quoted in the NT, nor appears more frequently in the Jewish annual lectionary and contemporary Catholic and Protestant lectionaries.

Isaiah was Amoz's son and is the Bible's only 8<sup>th</sup>-century prophet in Jerusalem. He was a sophisticated poet with an educated grasp of Israel's traditions. He enjoyed ready access to Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, but insisted that Jerusalem's elite bear deep ethical responsibility for those they governed. Prominent in his own prophecies, as well as in those that were later added to his book, are the paired expressions "justice" and "righteousness." Isaiah held that being God's people involved not only worship of Jerusalem's God but also behavior consistent with God's plans. God's care extended especially to the people without wealth, who stood outside the halls of power. Isaiah was appalled by those who used the legal system to enrich themselves and cheat the needy (Isa 10:1-2).

A major theme of Isaiah 1-39 is arrogance. Isaiah shows that the urge toward human greatness is empty. Pride, whether belonging to oppressor nations or to classes of people within Judean society, would inevitably be thwarted by God, who has planned a day "against all that is prideful and haughty" (Isa 2:12). People and even whole societies who pay no attention to the demands of justice won't stand, he said but as God's enemies they are bound for destruction.

*-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 1091-92 (OT)*

### **Reflect on these Scriptures:**

Isaiah 11:1-9 NRSV

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

*<sup>3</sup> His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;*

*<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

*<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

*<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.*

*<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*<sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*<sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;*

*for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

### **Commentary:**

Few texts in all of biblical literature are better known or loved than this one – and for good reason. For all who read or hear them read aloud, these verses articulate the deep and persistent human hope for justice and peace, and within the Christian church, this text expresses the promise of a Messiah who will establish peace on

earth. This is magnificent poetry, but it is not a poem. Nor is it a typical prophetic address, for the usual formulas attributing the words to the Lord are missing, and there is no direct address to an audience. However, a prophetic voice speaks, referring to Yahweh in the third person, proclaiming what the Lord will accomplish in the future.

The unifying theme of this proclamation of announcement of salvation is the coming reign of God, understood and presented in two ways. The first part (vv. 1-5) concerns the reign of God in the sociopolitical order by means of the birth or ascension of a new and ideal king from the line of David. The second element (vv. 6-9) promises the reign of God in the order of creation with the establishment of peace and tranquility among all creatures, including predators and their prey. It should be emphasized that this vision of the peaceable kingdom has nothing to do with "nature" as such. Here, as throughout the Hebrew Bible, the world is understood as God's creation. The vision of the peaceable kingdom in Isaiah is distinctly related to the promise of a Davidic king and with that to the celebration of kingship in the psalms (see especially Psalm 72), and quite likely also to wider ancient Near Eastern traditions.

As with Isa 9:1-7, what originated as the promise of a new king in ancient Jerusalem came to be understood as the prophecy of a messiah, fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. So the Christian reader must struggle to hear and understand both the ancient Israelite hope for a new descendant of King David who will be a just and faithful king, establishing justice and righteousness in governing a particular human society, and the faith of the church, which has seen that hope both fulfilled and transformed in Jesus of Nazareth.

– adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol VI. p. 139-140; 143

### **This week – *"Hope – It's what I always wanted!"***

In this text Isaiah acknowledges that the once proud Kingdom of Israel led by Jesse's son David and later Solomon was now a shadow of its former self. This former oak of the ancient near east had been felled. It was now merely a stump. But though diminished politically and most important, spiritually, God was not done with his people.

Isaiah sees a 'shoot' coming out of this stump, a sign of hope emerging from a root system nourished by the covenant love of God. This shoot, though initially unimpressive in the eyes of the world, would transform the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Contemporaries of Isaiah would have seen this fulfillment in an earthly king from the line of David. The earliest Christians would see this prophecy fully embodied in one who they would call the Son of David and Son of God, Jesus born in an unimpressive Bethlehem stable as a 'shoot' out of the line of Jesse.

This passage is a reminder that though trees rise and fall, our God is ever at work in the stumps of our lives, offering signs of hope to those who are receptive. But as with many gifts, hope must be 'unwrapped.'

### **Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. Where do you see 'stumps' in the world today? How about in your own life?
2. Have you ever missed or dismissed a 'shoot' (sign of hope), because it was not presented in a way you expected? Explain.
3. What shoots (signs of hope) do you see emerging (in the world, community, church or your own life) today? Do you tend to focus on their unimpressive present or their potential?
4. Isaiah sees this shoot empowered by the Holy Spirit. How can you be more open to the power of the Holy Spirit in your journey as a "shoot" in progress?
5. Close by praying for the emerging shoots identified by one another in your family or group.

### **Activity for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Isaiah 11:1 NRSV "*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*"
3. Take a pic of an example of a 'shoot' or sign of hope (if it is a pic of a person, ask permission for this to be shared on social media) and send it to Christy Allen ([callen@fumccoppell.org](mailto:callen@fumccoppell.org)). Let's unwrap some hope this week!