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Healing and Wholeness for Christmas
Isaiah 11:1-10

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

² *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—*

³ *and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.*

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

⁴ *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.*

⁵ *Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

⁶ *The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling ^[a] together;
and a little child will lead them.*

⁷ *The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

⁸ *The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

⁹ *They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

¹⁰ *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.*

Well, we have 17 days left until Christmas,
So what's on ***your to-do list right now?***

If you are making a ***mental list—what's on there?***
 Gifts? Food? Gatherings? Decorating? Parties?
 How are you ***feeling*** about it all?
 Are you stressed out?
 Or excited?
 Are you exhausted already?

Now, I want you to make another list—
 of your ***deepest hopes and dreams*** for Christmas!
 Seriously---what would you put on that list?

Reconciliation with family members?
Peace in your own home, or heart?
 A ***reunion*** of family or friends?
 What about the chance to ***go home***, or welcome others home?
 What about a sense of ***calm***?
 Or a sense of ***hope, love, or joy***?

What are your hopes---
 for your own ***heart***?
 Your own ***home***?
 And what about your hopes for the ***world***?

Do you pray for kids to not go hungry?
 Or people to have clean water?
 Do you dream of struggling families finding hope?
 Do you pray for those affected by violence, disaster, injustice, or prejudice—
 to find some justice and peace?

Go ahead—and if you have a pen and your bulletin,
write some words that describe your hopes and dreams!.....
Anyone want to share some?

Now, think about this.
What things on your to-do list could help you realize
 some of your deepest hopes and dreams?
 What things that you are doing to prepare for Christmas---could God use
 to help you move toward those deeper goals?
 What can you do to ***focus on the things that you really long for?***

What can you do to prioritize those things *that last*---
long after Christmas is over?

What if we all thought about that this week?

How can we truly celebrate the birth of Christ,
and not just a hectic Christmas season?

How can we seek *eternal treasures* at Christmas,
When earthly treasures seem to be vying for so much of our attention?

Last week we talked about an interesting movement of Pastors and churches,
called the ***Advent Conspiracy***.

It's a movement to fully celebrate the birth of Jesus,
And some of it was about ***LESS***—like spending less.

But a lot of it was about ***MORE***.

Like having more attention to worship,
And Giving more—of your heart, time, talent, and love,
And Loving more—of everyone, especially the least of these.

That movement is about finding things that *last*—
things that ***Isaiah*** tells us the messiah will bring—
like ***love, justice, peace, and hope***.

These are the things we really long for,
From our Savior Jesus, aren't they?

These are the things that have been ***promised*** throughout the scriptures,
and we have seen some of it when Jesus ***came***—
We see some of it ***today*** as His followers,
but the rest is yet to come, when Jesus ***returns***.

We live in an ***in-between time***—

between Jesus' coming as a baby born in Bethlehem,
and his ***second coming***, to redeem all humanity and all creation.

Just like the picture I showed the kids, we are waiting when all creation and all
humanity will be living in peace, love, joy, and hope.

Advent is all about that waiting for Jesus.

For Jesus' birth at Christmas, **AND** his return in the future.

Advent is about waiting with ***yearning, and longing, and expectation---*** for the gifts of Jesus, and the hope of eternal life, filled with all of God's goodness.

All throughout Advent we hear especially from the prophet ***Isaiah***, Who writes about the hope of a Messiah, a Savior, Who will bring peace, justice, and love to our world. Not just to the Jews, but to all nations, and all people.

And you know what's interesting?

Isaiah wrote these prophecies and promises from God-- during times of great persecution and suffering for God's people.

The Book of Isaiah is actually composed of three different parts— likely the first was written by the prophet Isaiah, and the next two sections were written at later times, in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah, using his name, and continuing God's promises and visions of a different future, with a Savior coming to save the world.

First Isaiah, the one who likely wrote the first 39 chapters, Was likely written during the time of what some call the 'first Jewish holocaust', a forty-year time period when the Assyrians ravaged the Jews in Palestine, in the years 740-700 B.C. They were savage. They tortured and persecuted God's people. And it was during this difficult time that Isaiah offered God's visions of hope, for justice and peace! Which makes his words all the more meaningful!

If you read through Isaiah, Or sing through it the beautiful Handel's 'Messiah', You'll get a picture of what Isaiah wanted us to expect. And if you had to sum it up in one word, that one word would be SHALOM.

Shalom is a Hebrew term for peace, but it means more than just the absence of war or conflict.

It is about ***wholeness, and healing.***
 The wholeness of ***body, mind, and spirit.***

Shalom is something that God's people longed for during the time of Isaiah,
 but isn't it something that all of us ***long for today?***
 Especially at Christmas?
 Especially during times of trial, hardship, or suffering?
 I know I do, what about you?

Today, on this second Sunday of Advent,
 we also have powerful words from ***John the Baptist***—
 the forerunner to Jesus,
 the one who came to 'prepare the way of the Lord',
 by preparing the hearts of the people to meet their Savior Jesus.

And during this Advent season of preparation,
 It ***makes sense to hear about John preparing the way for Jesus, right?***

But what does the message of John the Baptist
 have to do with the prophecies of Isaiah?
 Well, what if in some way, John fulfills some of what Isaiah prophesies—
 about a man of righteousness.
 John was a man of righteousness and justice,
 Who came to prepare the way for the ultimate Man
 of justice and righteousness, Jesus Christ.

And, John had ***a very special message*** for the people awaiting their Savior.
 While Isaiah's message was one of hope, peace, and justice.
 John's message was one of ***repentance.***

Repentance---what does that word make you think of?
 Does it make you think of being sorry?
 Or feeling guilty?

The Greek word for repentance in the Bible is metanoeo—
 which means ***to change one's mind, or re-orient oneself.***
 Repentance is not just about being sorry you messed up,
 and it's not about feeling guilty.
It's about a reorientation of life,

A new attitude,
 A new outlook.
 It's really about seeing things from God's point of view, and not our own.

So I wonder, don't we need the visions of ***Isaiah AND John the Baptist?***
 What if both visions are ***pathways to wholeness and healing?***

Listen again to the promises of Isaiah—
 we have heard them, and sung them, so often
 that they sometimes lose their meaning.
 But these words are ***transformative, and life-giving.***

⁵ *Righteousness will be his belt
 and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

⁶ *The wolf will live with the lamb,
 the leopard will lie down with the goat,
 the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together;
 and a little child will lead them.*

⁷ *The cow will feed with the bear,
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 on all my holy mountain,
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 will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

What if heard these words, with new hearts and minds?

What if we considered their context,
 and how they were written to people who were suffering, and hurting?

What if we heard them,

As God's word to us---to you, to me?

To all people who need that healing, wholeness, that shalom?

Friends, that would be Good News, right?

Today after the sermon,
we are going to have ***a time of prayer for healing and wholeness.***

You will be invited to come forward, if you wish,
for this special time of ***prayer***,
the laying on of ***hands***,
and ***anointing*** with oil, by making the sign of the cross on your forehead.

As I place my hand upon your head or shoulder,
Remember the healing touch of Jesus,
who touched people needing health and wholeness,
whether it was body, mind or spirit.

As I anoint you with oil, remember the meaning of this ancient practice.
Anointing with oil has been practiced by God's people for centuries.
For Jews and Christians,
anointing was a sign of ***hospitality*** for a guest visiting a home.
It was a symbol of ***inauguration***,
into a new office as king, or a religious official.
It was a way of honoring and preparing people for ***burial***, like when Mary
poured the anointed Jesus with expensive oil.
And anointing with oil was a sign of God's ***healing power for the sick.***

James 5:14 says that the sick should be anointed with oil for healing.
We also know that the twelve disciples
practiced the anointing of the sick,
as they were healing people in Mark 6:13.

This is the spirit of today's service.
The ***prayers*** I offer are for healing and wholeness.
The laying on of ***hands*** is a sign of Jesus' touch.
The ***anointing*** with oil is for healing-whether that is body, mind, or spirit.

You can ask for a specific request and I will pray for that,
or you can just bow your head slightly,
and I will pray, anoint, and bless you.

I believe we all need God's healing and wholeness—

and sometimes it is especially transformative
to hear words of healing and wholeness.

Because words have power, right?

Jesus was called the Word of God.

Actions also have power.

Jesus literally used his actions to reach out to those in need.

He touched people and healed them, he didn't just preach about it.

During this special time,

I invite you to come forward like we do for intinction communion,
only I encourage you to give the person at the front, a little more ***space***,
so that they will feel comfortable sharing a private request,
and receiving a blessing.

And I ask for ***silence*** as we proceed,
in honor of this special time.

We will have some special ***music***
to help in our meditation and prayers.

Don't feel like you must come forward.

I will be praying for all of you, whether you come forward or not.

If you prefer to not share your prayer request,
you can also write it down for myself or our prayer group,
on the slip in your bulletin insert,
and drop it into the offering plate,
or the prayer request box at the back of the sanctuary.

For the Good News of healing and wholeness that our Savior offers,

Let all God's people say, Amen.