

**Traditional Home service
Sunday 4th December**

READINGS - Isaiah 11.1-10
Romans 15.4-13
Matthew 3.1-12

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection. In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing. In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven. In your mercy, forgive us. Lord, hear us and help us.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord: and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (Come, Holy Ghost)

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (Lord of all hopefulness)

CONCLUSION

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1 Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
and lighten with celestial fire;
thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

2 Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life, and fire of love;
enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our mortal sight.

3 Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but one;
that through the ages all along
this may be our endless song:

4 Praise to thine eternal merit,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

1. Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all
joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares
can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us,
we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the
break of the day.

2. Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all
faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at
the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labors, and give us,
we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at
the noon of the day.

3. Lord of all kindness, Lord of all
grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your
arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us,
we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the
eve of the day.

4. Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all
calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose
presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us,
we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the
end of the day.

Sermon - Holly Horspole

ISAIAH 11:1-10 & MATTHEW 3:1-12 – HOPE FOR NEW LIFE AND PEACE

Intro Advent.....as we thought about last week, Advent is a time for us to focus on and anticipate the second coming of Jesus. Last week, Adrian helped us to think about the theme of hope – the hope we have that one day Jesus is going to return, and that in Jesus we have eternal life. And we also thought about how we can stay spiritually awake as we wait for Jesus to return. The message of hope in Jesus is central to this season of Advent, and so as we reflect on today's readings, we're going to continue thinking about hope – this week thinking about the hope we have in that God can bring new life from places that seem dead or hopeless, and the hope we have that when Jesus comes again, Jesus will establish true peace for all creation. And as we do that, we're going to mostly focus on our Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah.

So let's turn to these words from Isaiah...

To give us a little bit of context...Isaiah's message is for God's people – Israel, who in Isaiah's time were under threat, living in a time of unrest and war – Isaiah prophesies that God will allow Israel will be cut down and destroyed by their enemies. In Isaiah 6, Israel is compared to a tree that gets destroyed and chopped down, with only a small stump remaining. Isaiah prophesies that God's people, Israel, will become like a dead tree stump. And this is what ends up happening to Israel – they are conquered by other nations and the great, royal house of David is fallen. But despite these bleak circumstances, this is not the end of the story for God's chosen people.

Alongside this message of hardship and defeat for God's people, in Isaiah 11 we also find this message and promise of hope. What remains of God's people is nothing more than a dead tree stump. But God doesn't leave his people as a stump because within this dead tree stump God has planted a holy seed. This holy seed is a sign of hope and the promise that God will bring new life from something that appears dead and hopeless – from this seed a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse – a new branch will grow through the family line

of King David. Not only is something new going to grow, but it will bear fruit. This new shoot growing from the stump points us to the new and true king. A new king is coming, and his name is Jesus.

We have a God who is in the business of bringing hope and new life in places that seem dead or lifeless. We see this so clearly in Jesus's death on the cross – to so many, even to Jesus's closest disciples and followers, Jesus' death looked and felt like defeat. It looked like a dead tree stump. Even though Jesus had been teaching his followers that it was necessary for him to die, they didn't understand. Jesus's death looked like the end of the story. But of course, we know that it wasn't the end of the story – Jesus rose again. God brought new life from death. And through Jesus's death and resurrection we too have the hope of eternal life.

In Jesus, we have certain future hope. But our hope is not just for the future. I believe that God can and does bring hope and new life in the seemingly dead places of our lives today. I wonder if you can think of times in your own life when you have experienced God bringing hope and life within circumstances that felt dead or hopeless? Perhaps through....etc...

Where have you experienced God bringing hope and life into dead or unexpected places?

Or perhaps for you today, hope feels far off. Isaiah prophesied this message of the new branch growing from the dead tree stump probably around 700 years before Jesus was born – so for the people originally hearing Isaiah's message, I wonder how they received it? Did they dare to feel hopeful in the midst of their circumstances? Perhaps today you feel like you relate more to that image of a dead tree stump, and you can't see any new branches growing out of it. Are there places in your life where you feel cut off or maybe even dead? Where are the stumps in our lives? Could we dare to believe that God can bring new life and hope into those circumstances? Of course, hope and new life might not look like getting the outcomes we want, or the answers we long for. Hope and new life might not come in the way we expect it to – in my experience, it usually doesn't. Hope and new life might not

even look like a solution or a change in our actual circumstances – but it might come through God giving us a new perspective, wisdom, or strength within our suffering.

In Hosea (2:15) there's a verse that speaks about how God will make the 'valley of Achor a door of hope'. The valley of Achor was a place where, for God's people, it was associated with defeat and trouble – it was place of pain and failure and death. But God promises that one day that very place of pain will become a door of hope. It will become a place through which God's people will encounter God's presence and the hope of new life that he offers. God can and does and will bring hope and new life in dead places.

But let's not forget about the bigger story that we are all a part of...God brings hope and new life in our lives here and now today, but we also mustn't lose sight of the ultimate hope that Isaiah is pointing us to – the coming of the new and true king, Jesus. In all circumstances and seasons we must look to Jesus. Through pointing us to Jesus, Isaiah is showing that the hope for the survival and salvation of God's people is not found in their human leaders or kings – not even through King David, who is Israel's most celebrated king. Hope for God's people is not found in human leaders, but only in God through Jesus. Isaiah points us to the coming king who will not lead in human strength or might, but Jesus – the one who will lead in and through the Spirit of God.

Isaiah tells us exactly what kind of ruler Jesus is and will be... Jesus will rule in the strength of the Spirit of the Lord – God's spirit will equip him to rule with wisdom, knowledge and understanding, counsel and might. Jesus will rule and judge with righteousness, bringing justice for the poor and the vulnerable of the earth. With the word of his mouth, Jesus will deal with the wicked once and for all. Jesus's will be unlike any human king or ruler God's people have had before – Jesus will rule with true righteousness and faithfulness. In this image of Jesus as the coming king – the shoot coming from the stump of Jesse, Isaiah gives God's people hope that there is a righteous king coming. Isn't this good news?

And what will Jesus's reign will look like? What will Jesus's Kingdom be like? Isaiah tells us what kind of kingdom Jesus will establish among us. Jesus will usher in a kingdom of peace. Isaiah gives us all these images of animals who we would expect to live as enemies – as predator and prey, but under Jesus's rule these creatures are able to live together peacefully. ...Nature documentary illustration... They can be really brutal and gruesome to watch! But through these images, Isaiah is telling us that when Jesus returns, things will be different. No longer will the smaller and perhaps weaker parts of our creation be dominated and destroyed by the predators of the world.

Isaiah gives us images of the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, the calf and the lion. These creatures will live together peacefully and there will be no more harm or destruction. These descriptions of animals are a sign of what is to come for God's people – it's not just talking about animals, but all divisions amongst humankind will be broken down...I'm sure if I asked you, we could all think of people or groups of people that we might identify as wolves and lambs. But when Jesus

comes again, wars between nations will cease, there will be no more oppression or injustice, no more corrupt leadership or abuse of power. The current order of things will be transformed – the wolves will live with the lambs in harmony.

Through Jesus, God promises that a time is coming when there truly will be peace. Not just a temporary ceasefire or a short break from suffering. When Jesus comes again, there will be complete and perfect peace. Is this not what we long for? And through Jesus, God's promise of peace is no longer just for the people of Israel, but for all of creation. God's promise of hope and peace in Jesus is for each one of us here today. And while our world won't have true and complete peace until Jesus comes again, we can experience and see signs of Jesus's kingdom of peace here and now today..... We can choose to live in a way that points others to the hope of new life and peace that God promises in Jesus.

Our Gospel reading for today was about John the Baptist calling people to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near.

John the Baptist is a great example of someone who pointed others to Jesus – he spent his life preparing the way for Jesus, pointing people to what was going to come in the future. People didn't always respond well to what he said, but John was faithful in pointing beyond himself to Jesus. I want to be like that! How can we as individuals and as a church live in a way that points people to the present and future hope and peace that God promises in Jesus?

... I'm going to leave those as questions for us to continue reflecting on. In Jesus we have certain future hope for eternal life and for peace. We also have the hope that God can bring life and hope in unexpected places. I don't know how close or far away that sense of hope for peace and new life feels to you today. But this season of Advent is the time to focus on that hope. To draw near to God. To anticipate Jesus's return. To remember that Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us. In my opinion, our society isn't an easy place to live at the moment – I find myself struggling with the things I'm reading in the news, the things I see going on in the world, the circumstances my friends and family are facing, and even some of the things I'm holding. But those are the places where I can declare the hope of Jesus. Those are the places where the promises of peace and hope and life become most real to me. Those are the places where I can invite God in and pray 'Come, Lord Jesus'. That simple prayer 'Come, Lord Jesus' is often prayed in Advent as we anticipate the return of Jesus. And so as

we finish, we're going to pray that prayer over situations where we long to see Jesus's peace, or new life in dead or unexpected places...