

*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. <sup>10</sup>On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

I get to choose this morning between grim future and a joyous one. I'll take the joyous one.

I get to choose between John the Baptist who tells of the ax that is now laid at the root of the trees, and Isaiah who tells of lions munching on straw like the oxen do. If you do not bear good fruit you are going to be cut down, John shouts. Isaiah whispers: The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid.

There is one coming after me, says John who will gather the wheat into his granary, but burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. And Isaiah tells of the shoot growing out of a stump who will judge the poor with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

They are both telling of Jesus.

And when he came nothing was quite as they imagined.

I went shopping the other day. As I paid for my purchase the sales person asked me what I did for a living, then told me his story. Then he wanted to know how he could experience God. Raised in the church, worshipping regularly now, in his crisis he needed God to be more than God is for him now. I think he needed God to be a voice he could hear, or a presence that gave him relief from his inner turmoil. I think he wanted me to tell him the secret so that he could

arrive already at the end of the road. He wanted God to be all that he dreamed God would be. That's what I want. Maybe you too.

How easy to be disappointed when the shoot grows from the stump of Jesse as Isaiah predicted and the wolves are still gobbling the lambs. How easy to be disappointed like John, when he discovered no fire came down from heaven with Jesus to destroy all evil. How easy to be disappointed when we decide what God must be in order to be God for us.

Martin Luther wrote, to seek God apart from Christ is the devil.

A mother prays: Keep my son safe in Bosnia. If you are really God, keep my son safe. And if the son should die, will she cry out that there is no love in God? Will her heart grow cold, will she pray no more?

A man gives his ten percent to the church, worships every Sunday, treats his customers and employees well, and still his business fails. If he thought all along that his faithfulness would buy him God's favor, then he will lose not only his business but his God just when the going is tough for him.

Jesus told of workers who were angry when the late comers were paid the same as they who had worked the whole day. Jesus told of an older brother who could not reconcile himself with his Father's welcoming home his prodigal brother. Jesus told of a rich man who found himself in torment while the poor man he had ignored was in Abraham's bosom. Each had worshipped a God of his own making, each ended at risk of losing the God who is.

Yes, to seek God apart from Christ is the devil. Next week we will hear that John the Baptist in prison having heard what Jesus was doing will send word, "Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?" Jesus did not fit what John expected. Jesus sent word back telling John what Jesus was doing, and then added these words, "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Jesus is God in human flesh. Jesus Christ is where we encounter the Almighty God. He is the only truth about God that we know. Everything else is speculation. Everything that John spoke and everything which Isaiah wrote was to point to him. He is the tender shoot from the stump of Jesse. The spirit of the Lord is upon him. And the future belongs to him. Jesus is the promised one who will one day bring an end to all the wars that cause mother's sons to return home in coffins. And the wolf shall lie down with the lamb.

Jesus is the one who will burn up all evil and gather all the harvest into the granaries of God, just as John predicted. Jesus is the one who is the answer to the hopes of the young man I encountered in the store. But Jesus will be and do all of this in his own time and in his own way.

Just as he was born in a place and a time that no one expected, died a death most unfitting for the Messiah, just as he was raised in a most astonishing way.

And now he does something even more startling. He comes to you this morning. He enters into you in bread and in wine, giving you all his forgiveness and love. Like John the Baptist you might wonder whether to look for something more. But there is no more of God that is given to you than Mary's child, the one who was crucified on the cross and raised that you might know him God's only Son, your Lord.