

Isaiah 11 Sermon

Church on the Corner

1 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 power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the 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 hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

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

Introduction

We are facing a crisis of Leadership, nationally and globally. And the temptation is to disengage or to despair. There is a real danger of disillusionment, disengagement and despair. But that is the last thing we need. We need a new vision of leadership.

Context

Isaiah is written to a people who are observing the decline and fall of their once great culture.

Picture the scene. A desolate land, ash and darkness wherever you look and at the heart of the picture is the burned stump of what was clearly once mighty tree. It is a tragic and apparently hopeless scene. But then a tiny fleck of green. From the heart of the tree stump is a shoot. The tree is not dead, the roots are still alive. There is hope, there will be a new beginning.

“the stump of Jesse”

Jesse was King Davids Father - you might remember the story of the prophet Samuel who was sent in secret to the home of Jess in Bethlehem to anoint the new king of Israel. He met all the sons of Jesse - but none of them was the anointed one. Is there another? Only the boy David caring for the sheep...

That house of Jesse, the kingdom of David is not dead. The shoot is the birth of a new king. The hope that God offers to the crisis you face is leadership.

We get that this points to Christ - that he is our true king. But it also offers us a model of what leadership should look like, and what we should demand of our leaders. This is the model of Godly leadership. And though of course none of us can come up to this standard, it doesn't mean that we don't hold on to the ideal.

1) v2 **It is leadership founded on wisdom, understanding and knowledge**

Leaders should be the best of us. both in terms of Character and in Wisdom. There is a tendency to apologise for learning and intelligence.

I'm struck that Jesus was first and foremost a teacher, a rabbi. Everything else flowed out of that - his miracles were almost exclusively to illustrate his teaching.

One of the amazing thing about becoming a Christian is the experience of making sense of the world. What was once mysterious and confusing now makes sense. We have a story that makes sense of the world and our experience. A leader should have the capacity to make sense of the world, to bring clarity and

I think we get that Leadership in church should be about teaching - of course it isn't just that - but without the ability to enrich our hearts and deepen our understanding.

I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist... and teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.

John Steinbeck

Leaders should not pander to peoples opinions. Their job is to challenge, teach and educate - to lift peoples eyes to what could be. To confront misunderstanding, to clarify confusion. If we elect leaders for other reasons than that - on our own head be it.

2) v3 **Leadership is founded on sound judgement.**

We don't like the word judgment - it sounds judgemental. Jesus said 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. And that's right - but it doesn't mean never judge - just that you will be judged by the measure that you use. Hypocrisy is the problem here.

Leadership requires the capacity to make good judgements. Leaders will often have to make hard decisions - and we should be mindful of that. It isn't about pleasing people - it is judging what is right and acting on it.

He will not judge by appearances

*v3b “He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears”*

The capacity to see beyond the surface, to see through the confusion and the lies and to understand how things really are.

And look how that judgement is enacted.

*v4b “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”*

The language sound violent - but it isn't. It is his words that do the damage. It is about truth. *“The truth is like a lion; you don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself.”*

St Augustine

This is the Jesus we find in the gospels - Speaking truth to power, confronting falsehood and corruption, standing up for the poor, challenging injustice and oppression wherever he finds it, at no thought to the cost to himself.

“The truth is like the sun - you can block it out, but it isn't going away”

It is significant how this Jesus is lost to our culture. Nicer than nice. He really isn't - he is quite uncomfortable.

3) **Leadership upheld by Righteousness & Faithfulness**

v5 “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.”

Leaders have consistently fallen because of their moral failures. The point of the sash and the belt is that they are the things that hold everything together - literally they keep your trousers up.

Righteousness in this case is just action. Do right and fear no man. If you have acted justly you don't need to be afraid.

And faithfulness is never giving up. Change for good often does not come quickly. Remember William Wilberforce campaigned against slavery for over 40 years.

4) v6-9 It holds out hope.

*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.*

Hope is the greatest thing. What we are offered here is a stunning picture of the coming kingdom. Is this image primarily figurative? - the end of violence and war, or in some way literal; a creation no longer red in tooth and claw, no longer the survival of the fittest? Of creation restored to its intended state.

However it works, this rich image is intended to inhabit our imagination as a picture of the goal to which we are called.

But I'm struck by how visual this is... The importance of Art, literature and imagination if faith. I love this image. And I think it is both figurative and a picture of eternity.

A new heaven and a new earth. Hold on to that hope not just of a better world, but of creation restored.

And one last thing - The Kingdom comes through knowledge.

v9b "*the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*"

Of course knowledge has a dual meaning - knowledge about God isn't enough. We are called to know God. Theology & relationship. But one day we will see things as they really are. When heaven and earth are reunited. No longer will it be this desert land, where the knowledge of God is like springs in the wilderness. One day our knowledge of God will be complete.

I suspect that much of our struggle is down to this limited knowledge of God - we see the world through the eyes of those who live as though there were no God. We find it hard to pray, because we lose sight of God. We make bad choices about life, because we forget God. We live for the short term. We are selfish and hurtful, because we forget God.

Our calling is to live in the light of eternity, and that means to pursue the knowledge of God.

And finally. The picture of a green shoot is not the whole story.

I think that you are all green shoots in the midst of your world.

As Isaiah 8 said - you are signs and symbols from God in the midst of your culture. You are signs of new life, part of the restoration of all things.

You are called to live in the light of the sun - to live as those who know how things really are. And in the way you exercise leadership and in the sort of leaders you demand you reflect the character of God, and Christ, who was and is and is to come.