

Advent 2A: Isaiah 11 – Signs, signs everywhere a sign.

1. Advent is a season of preparation and looking ahead, and part of being prepared is knowing where you're going and what you're looking for, and to do that you often have to follow signs
 - a. There is a song originally done by The Five Man Electrical Band in the early 70s that's been remade a couple of times some of you may know, **"Sign, sign, everywhere a sign Blocking up the scenery, breaking my mind Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?"**
 - i. We live in a world that's marked by many signs all vying for our attention
 - ii. We know what it's like to travel down a road that's not well marked: you don't know what dangers are coming, which way to go at cross streets, etc
 - b. Signs can serve several different purposes
 - i. They point you in the right direction, help you avoid danger
 - ii. They can also tell you when you've arrived, marking a destination
 - iii. But you have to be careful which signs you follow or you'll be lost
2. Isaiah talks about a sign that will come in the latter days that will be for all people, but this sign isn't a billboard or a poster, it's a person
 - a. **"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."** (Is 11:10)
 - i. The signal spoken of here is like a battle flag or ensign, something that draws attention to let soldiers know where their troops are, it provides a rallying point
 - ii. So, One was to come in the future who was from Israel but wasn't meant only for Israel – He would be a signal for the nations (in Hebrew Gentiles)
 - iii. This sign is a sign of invitation to people that they could look to and know that where He is there is salvation.
 - b. Isaiah also gives us some information about Him so that we identify the right sign
 - i. **"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."** (Is 11:1)
 - ii. His will be of royal lineage, from Jesse, King David's father
 - iii. Interestingly Isaiah doesn't say that He'd be David's son, which would imply that David might be greater but another One like David, new David
 - iv. He would restore Israel, a new Israel, a spiritual Israel, better than David
 - c. **Isa 11:2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**
 - i. Jesus is God Himself, the second person of the Trinity, yet as a man the Holy Spirit also enabled Him in His ministry
 - ii. This is what we hear from Matthew a few verses after our Gospel reading, **"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him."** (Mt 3:16)

3. But people don't like being told where to go or how to get there...don't like directions
 - a. There's always the proverbial instance of the husband who won't pull over to ask for directions because he "never gets lost,"
 - i. Then there's me who can get lost even following a GPS because I'm not paying attention to it – you have to pay attention to be led
 - ii. For some it's a matter of pride...for others it's a matter of attention
 - iii. But either way it's a matter of sin and shortsightedness – we don't want to be told where to go or to be led by anything other than ourselves.
 - b. We'd like to think that we know where we're going, "Just tell me the destination and I'm sure I'll get there."
 - i. The problem is we go down the wrong path all the time
 - ii. Scripture tells us, "**We all like sheep have gone astray.**" (Is 53:6)
 - iii. So, like wandering sheep we need another to point us in the right direction
 - c. Our Gospel tells us about John the Baptist who pointed the way to the sign, "**I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**" (Mt 3:11)
 - i. John's purpose was to pave the way for the Messiah, he was the last of the OT prophets, "**For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'**" (Is 40:3)
 - ii. But many in his day, like the Pharisees and religious leaders of Israel, were following the wrong sign; they thought their lineage as Jews gave them full rights to entrance into heaven.
 - iii. But John chastised them, "**And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**" (Mt 3:9)
 - d. He was saying if your eyes aren't on Jesus...if He's not the path you follow through faith you're hopelessly lost
 - i. For no merit of our own...no other spiritual guide...no other entity called a god will get you in heaven – they are all signs leading to a dead end
 - ii. John was sent to wake people up, shake them out of their self-made delusions about salvation
 - iii. His message, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" (Mt 3:2)
 - iv. It was a stern message of condemnation (tough love) meant to turn people to the only place they could go for safety and forgiveness – Jesus
4. John's message continues today – God hasn't left Himself without a witness in the world
 - a. There is one who prepares the way of the Lord, a path of repentance meant to shake the world out of its self-induced spiritual stupor fed on Oprah spirituality
 - i. It is the Church whose proclamation of Law and Gospel not only points the way to safety in Christ but paves the path for you to reach Him

- ii. Only here will you hear that, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”** (Is 64:6)
 - iii. That message of tough love is proclaimed to wake you up to your need for forgiveness.
 - iv. Because Jesus lived the righteous life you could not and gave Himself up to death in your place you are forgiven and in Him only is eternal life!
- b. And this signal, Christ, will inaugurate God’s restored Kingdom, a return to Paradise lost by Adam and Eve’s sin
 - i. In one of the most misquoted images of Scripture we hear of a return to Edenic innocence, **“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.”** (Isa 11:6)
 - ii. How many of us (including me) thought that it was the lion and the lamb?
 - iii. But regardless, the image is the same – predator and prey will be at peace with a vegetarian diet like we all had in the Garden.
 - iv. Christ has restored what we broke and where He is there is peace, life and salvation.
- c. Signs, signs everywhere are signs...the world will tell you they all end up in the same place, but only One leads to eternal life believe in Him and you will live!