

“When Star Child Meets Street Child”
Isaiah 11:1-10
Sermon

It was not much to see. It was a simple, little sprout of green, which had poked its way through the lava. How long did it take to happen? I have no idea. But I can attest that it did. Seeing is believing, as they say. I saw it with my own eyes. It was amazing. If you have ever walked on a lava field, you will recognize the amazement. Unless one knows better, one would assume nothing could grow through lava, it is simply too hard. The image stays with me and always reminds me of **J.B.**, a play written by Archibald MacLeish. It was written in 1958. **J.B.** is the story of Job told in what was, at the time, a modern setting. As you likely know, Job is the long suffering, once prominent man, who loses all he values, including his family and his fortune, who we meet in a legend in the Jewish Scripture. It is a cautionary tale of shifting fortune, and of tested faith. In the version I saw, the final scene is dramatic. There is no sound. The stage is dark? **J.B.** has lost everything. The mood is somber. Just as the play is about to end, a light brightens in the center of the stage, a garbage can stands illuminated. It is a poignant moment. The mood changes from gloom and doom to hope and possibility, as slowly, but surely, a sprig of green, a sign of life rises from the garbage can.

MacLeish got it right. Isaiah got it right. Maybe the literal history is off. Maybe the Church has misused and misunderstood this passage for years. The message may not accurately reflect the facts, as they say, on the ground. But the message of a hopeful new beginning, that is another thing. Where would any of us be if hope in a better tomorrow were not a possibility? Where would we be without reason to hope, reason to work toward bringing that hope to fruition?

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, which, among other things, challenges the people to hope for that better day, to hope for a peaceable kingdom, to hope for a God, who will lead the way to that better day. The idea that hope is not possible, that hope is like a lifeless stump, destined to rot, is a misbegotten idea. God, the source of life, will see to it.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots. 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. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

If this be so than the hymn Writer has reason to pray *This year, this year, let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive*. She has reason because there is no lava strong enough, thick enough, tough enough, to keep life from happening. *A shoot shall come*. It always does. And if that be so, the *street child, the beat child*, the one who has *no place left to go*, has a reason to hang in there, because Christmas, the sprig that grows regardless the circumstances, refuses not to happen.

This is the hope that is Christmas, this is the hope that is Christ, this is the hope that stubbornly refuses to give in. There is always *a place to go*. There is always the reality of new life appearing in the most unexpected places.

We find it in the face of an addict, who celebrates 24 hours of sobriety.

We find it in the broken, yet healing relationships that dare to hang on.

We find it in the life of those going forward after terrible losses.

We find it in the new day, when the fears of the night give way to a new possibility.

But!

Yes, there it is again, the cussed -butø But it will not be so unless we allow the lava of our lives, the thick, dark, seemingly impenetrable places of our lives, to see the cracks for what they are, to see them as the opening for new life.

Even for us, the supposedly more enlightened, for us in this unbelievable time, this time where we humans have the ability to enable life to continue, this time when we can literally destroy it, it is possible to hear with new ears.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots. This shoot will have the spirit of God, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

That shoot can be seen in the *street-child* with *no place left to go*. It can be seen anywhere and everywhere, by anyone and everyone, who is open to seeing the reality. *A stump*, something seemingly dead and rotting, can be exactly where the *street child* meets the *star-child*, where the seemingly lost find a way, where a place to go is discovered.

David was barely a teenager when his life fell apart. His family were active members of the congregation I served. To outward appearances they were a typical well adjusted, loving family. David loved his Dad deeply. In fact he almost idolized him. His Dad was always there for him, and his sister and for their Mom. He was anything but a *street-child with no place to go*. That is until he learned that his father was moving out of the house in order to be with someone other than David's mom. Accepting that reality was probably the most difficult issue he had to face in his young life. I remember sitting with him in the local *Friendly's*, as he sobbed through picking at his ice cream sundae. I still can hear him saying, as only teenagers can, *my life is over. I still love my Dad, but I don't trust him anymore. I used to tell him everything and anything. Now I can't. How will I ever be able to again?*

You might say, David, in that awareness, became a street child and did not see any way to go. Fast forward a few months. The pain was still real. We were back in *Friendly's* having yet another ice cream sundae and David said *Mr. Stinson, you were right, things do get better. They have. I know my Mom and Dad are not going to get together again, but I can still talk to either of them and they will still listen and help me. My life is not over. It's just different.*

You see, there is always a shoot, always new life possible, if we allow the cracks to become avenues for the new life within. The darkness always gives way, death always leads to new life. This Advent season there are new shoots everywhere. See them. Acknowledge them. Allow them to blossom, letting go of fear and worry. Or as David once heard me say, while you wait for your life to get back on track, enjoy the ice cream Sundae. It's on me.

More importantly, the One who loves us is preparing the stumps in our lives to bring forth new life. The ice-cream, if you will, is ours to enjoy. Advent is a season, if you will, of being surprised by God's refusal to let us remain as street children. Advent is a time to remember and celebrate the Star-Child within all of us. So, if life sometimes seems to be off track, relax and enjoy the ice cream while you wait for something even better.

A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots.