

## “INTRODUCING THE AMAZING SHOOT!”

Isaiah 11:1-10

December 7, 2025

Have you ever been to a zoo or amusement park and watched a **portrait artist** draw a picture? They offer to draw your picture for a few dollars. If you agree, they have you sit, pick up their markers and begin to sketch you rather quickly in cartoon-like fashion. What I mean is your picture isn't an exact replica of you. The sketch is drawn with exaggerated features, such as your nose, forehead, eyes, or mouth. The artist isn't mocking anyone, but they are creating a fun keepsake.

In reflecting on these sketches, it occurred to me that great story tellers use exaggeration, unconventional characters and actions to draw us in and express their view of life. Jesus does this all the time in his parables. He makes the bad guy, the good guy, the outsider the insider, the little seed become a giant crop. Why? Because it gets our attention, it helps us remember the story, but most importantly it serves as a vehicle to expand our view of the world. These exaggerations help us glimpse what the kingdom of God looks like.

Of course, Jesus wasn't the first storyteller who used embellishment to make a point. Take our friend the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Isaiah speaks some visually vibrant words to the people of Jerusalem. The Assyrian Empire has mowed down all the neighbors of Judah and is knocking on the doors of the city. Isaiah describes the devastation as a great forest that has been chopped and burnt to the ground. Jerusalem barely escapes the onslaught by a hair. But the people are terrified that the army will return and finish the job.

In view of this devastating forest scene Isaiah draws another picture. Out of one of those burned out stumps **a green growing shoot** suddenly pops up. This

startling contrast catches our attention for in it we see life and hope reborn. This shoot, this life, and this hope take the form of a newborn king, birthed upon the roots of the Davidic promise that there would be one who will rule forever on David's throne.

But just like the people of Israel, we have had plenty of kings, rulers, presidents and politicians, that quite frankly didn't give us much to hope for. Their character flaws and political biases left much to be desired and, in the end, didn't really benefit the average citizen. We can imagine the people of Jerusalem, responding to Isaiah, **“So what, how is this coming king going to be any different from all the other failures? We have real problems that need real solutions. What's to stop this new shoot from withering on the vine and our hope dying with it?”** Good questions all and Isaiah answers with another picture.

## **I. SPIRIT DRIVEN**

There is **2019 film** I have been wanting to see called **The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind**. It is about a young Malawian named William who has a mechanical talent. After reading a book about electrical engineering and energy production he sets out to build a **windmill** to power the town's broken water pump.

William's farming village is devastated by a drought, and their only hope is getting water from the ground. With the help of his friends and the component taken from Kachigunda's bicycle, they build a full-size windmill which leads to a successful crop being sown. The wind and the ability to catch it save the village. It provides the village with life giving water and abundant life.

We know the word for wind in the bible is the same word for Spirit. When that Spirit blows upon us new life happens. Isaiah tells us, **“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.”**

These gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, and knowledge are the very skills that a good leader needs, regardless of the organization. These skills are needed to make good decisions, set policies, priorities, and guide those in care of the leader. The important point is these are not natural talents but Spirit given gifts. Isaiah tells us this new king is different from the rest because he is **spirit driven**. Now here is the catch. The only way to be spirit driven is to be a leader who **fears the Lord**.

Twice Isaiah uses the phrase, “**...and the fear of the Lord.**” In fact he states this ruler will **delight** in the fear of the Lord. This sounds contradictory, but the phrase does not mean we are terrified of God. “**The fear of the Lord means a deep respect, awe, and reverence for God that results in humble, loving obedience and a desire to live in a way that pleases God.** It's not a fearful anxiety but rather a **profound awareness of God's holiness, power, and presence, combined with a belief in his goodness and love.** This “**reverent fear**” is often described as the beginning of wisdom. It is the **key** that unlocks all the other spiritual gifts.

We desperately need leaders of the community, of the church, and of the government to be **Spirit Driven Leaders**, who fear the Lord and depend on the lifegiving, future creating, world-forming, despair ending, powerful wind of the spirit that utters newness and opens us to new possibilities. Without this spirit we are left to our own small power, ignorance, and selfish ambition to guide us. And we know what devastation that brings.

## II. JUSTICE DRIVEN

My wife is a big fan of the **Naval Criminal Investigation Service or NCIS** for short. Then again maybe she just likes watching actor Mark Harmon. But she has seen every episode of its 23 seasons multiple times. But I know she is not the only one that likes police shows. People have been enamored with this genre for a long time. I still remember TV shows like Dragnet, Adam 12, and TJ Hooker. Just for fun I asked AI how many cop shows have aired over the years. According to one source nearly 300 police dramas have aired on TV, cable and syndicated TV. That is a lot of programming dedicated to the justice system.

However, I sometimes wonder if all these shows have given us the wrong idea about justice. We tend to think about justice in terms of winning court battles, investigation, making arrests, sending crooks to prison, getting huge settlement payments, and having talented legal teams. But that is not quite what the Bible means by justice.

Biblical justice is not about winners or losers of a court case, but a focus on making situations right, fair and equitable for everyone concerned. Justice in the Bible is concerned that everyone has access to the basics of life, no matter the case. Justice in the bible is practicing hospitality even to an enemy. Justice in the bible is treating the foreigner, the immigrant, and the stranger like family. Justice in the bible is not about weaponizing the law for one's political gain but about creating peace and harmony in the culture that all might prosper and be free of exploitation. In Israel, this was the duty of the king to make this happen to the best of his ability.

Isaiah writes, **“He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide**

**with equity for the oppressed 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. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins.**

In other words, this coming king is not going to be persuaded by bribes, greed, political maneuvering, lobbyists, selfish ambition, or party loyalty. He is not open to propaganda or rhetoric spins. This king will see through to the truth. He won't be deceived. He will judge in favor of the poor and oppressed, the most vulnerable and needy of the world. He will not be catering to the top 1% but those at the bottom who have no percentage. This king has impeccable character and is a threat to the powerful, the crooked, and the exploiters of the world.

Because this leader is spirit driven and justice driven his kingdom will be one of peace and harmony. Which is the picture Isaiah paints for in the next 4 verses.

### **III. PEACE DRIVEN**

This **animal living in harmony picture** is both beautiful and other worldly. Can you imagine a wolf laying down next to a sheep, or a lion eating grass next to a cow? What mother would let their child play around a poisonous snake's lair? We might like the thought but it's not goanna happen! You put a hungry leopard in a pen with a goat and only one is coming out alive. That's the way prey and predators work in the world. Isaiah's picture is an affront to life as we know it.

But Isaiah's vision is not really about animals. He explains, **"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."** Isaiah is dreaming of a world under God's reign, where there is no more violence, no more exploitation,

no more destruction, where children are in no danger from bombings, hunger, or predators. He paints a picture of productive, fruitful lives for all. A world where trust, gentleness, and friendship are made possible. Peace and harmony reign.

Professor **Catherine Gonzalez** writes, “In the midst of all that would have us live without faith, in the face of secular apathy and the incomprehensible pain of suffering and death, we are asked to live according to the claim that God is among us and is leading us toward the victory which Christ assured on the cross. I understand that above all else, the church is called to witness to a beautiful alternative reality, a reality in which “the wolf shall live with the lamb ... and a little child shall lead them.”

I don’t know if Isaiah’s beautiful picture will ever be fully realized on this side of eternity. But **Advent** challenges us embrace the **King of Peace** who has the power to make that vision a reality. **Advent** asks us to trust the wind of the Spirit and walk in the fear of the Lord.

**Advent** asks us look for leaders that are just, humble, discerning, and Spirit Driven. **Advent** asks us to expand our view and embrace a Kingdom vision by working for harmony, unity, and peace in the places we live and breathe.

Billy Graham once wrote, “Peace often must begin with ourselves: "Love is not a vague feeling or an abstract idea. When I love someone, I seek what is best for them. If I begin to take the love of Christ seriously, then I will work toward what is best for my neighbor. I will seek to bind up the wounds and bring about healing, no matter what the cost may be."

Do you get the picture? **Amen.**

# **First Presbyterian Church in Hawley**

## **Sunday, December 7, 2025**

### **Second Scripture Lesson**

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#### **Isaiah 11:1-10**

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

2 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.

3 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,

4 but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed 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.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

9 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.

10 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**