

"Worst Possible Enemy or Best Possible Friend"

Text: Isaiah 11:1-10

Quoting the Prophet Isaiah, Paul writes: ***"The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."*** ¹³ ¶ ***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*** (Romans 15:12-13)

Dear Fellow Christians:

I freely confess that I've never understood the appeal of horror movies. I'm not talking about "psychological thrillers" – which I sort of get. I'm talking about "slasher" movies – blood, gore, chainsaws, knives, axes, and all that. Nor do I understand the appeal of demon-possession movies, which apparently include all the worst of the slasher movies. What is the appeal of spending time and money to fill your mind with terror? That stuff sticks with you. You can't unsee it. A friend talked me into watching *The Exorcist* 50 years ago and, regrettably, I remember parts of it to this day. It was, by the way, the first and last horror movie I ever saw.

It's just a guess, but I imagine the appeal is something along the lines of *"I like pain, because it feels so good when it finally goes away."* In other words, people like to be terrified because it's such a relief when the terror passes. *"Besides, it's all just pretend... The sort of things I see in those movies almost never happen."* The key there is "almost" – *almost* never. Isn't that the dark stain that is indelibly imprinted in the mind? I'm guessing it also creates a sense of immunity, as in *"I survived that movie, so even if something terrible like that really does happen, I'll be okay."*

God's Word repeatedly teaches us that darkness and light are incompatible. That means that if something is not light, it is darkness, and if it is darkness we can know that Satan is working there to advance his goal of destroying souls. Maybe that goal, beyond creating a naïve sense of immunity, is as simple as numbing human beings to the real horrors that actually do exist in our world.

Keep that thought in mind as you read our text for this morning. See if the real and present danger here indicated passes under your radar, or

if you notice but dismiss it. Our text is found in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the 11th Chapter:

ESV ***Isaiah 11:1-10*** ***There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 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. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and 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 of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. ⁶ 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. 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ ¶ 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.***

This is God's Word – the Word of the Creator of heaven and earth. Acknowledging and trusting the Source of these words, we pray that God would also bless us with a full and correct understanding of these his words, and through their study grant us wisdom, strength, and comfort. To this end we pray: ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

This text from the Prophet Isaiah is actually extraordinarily peaceful and serene, isn't it? Uplifting and comforting. In fact at first glance it appears to be just about the farthest thing possible from our introduction. But is it?

Most human beings like to think in terms of happily ever after – Hallmark, not horror. Most see people, including themselves, as basically good. Never in my life have I met someone who actually believed that he or she was wicked enough to be eternally condemned by a righteous God. No matter how faithless the life and

no matter how wicked the lifestyle, human beings tend to think of themselves as "pretty good people," as souls fully deserving of God's heaven.

But take another, closer look at our text. Before there was the joy and renewal there described, there had to have been fear and great sadness. Before there was the new green growth, there was the stump. Before there was a stump there was once a living tree. Something cut it down. That something was God.

In the analogy of our text, the stump had once been Israel – God's own special living tree. Once that tree had indeed thrived – magnificently so. God created the tree to live. It was not made to die. In fact God would have liked nothing more than to see the tree that was the nation of Israel continue to live and grow and flourish. His desire was that that tree would continue to provide shelter and comfort for all who flocked to its shade – as in the days of King David and his son Solomon. God wanted all the world to come to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He wanted them to know the God of promise.

So with infinite patience God watered that tree with his Word. He sent his prophets to prune its branches and to warn against continued neglect. Time after time the Lord looked for the fruits of faith from his precious, chosen tree – and with few exceptions found none. Year after year the rot, the decay, spread, until God finally laid his ax to its base. How terrible, how tragic, to see the fall of God's chosen race and people. How it must have disappointed God to have to simply chop off that which had received so much of his patience, love, and attention.

But cut off Israel he did, and that is absolutely a message that our own old Adam needs to hear. It is, in fact, a divine truth that the sinful flesh of *all mankind* desperately needs to understand. God's patience dare never be confused with God's favor or approval. Sin has that power, doesn't it – the power to change how we regard sin? You know this to be true. Sin just once, and your conscience screams its condemnation. Sin again, and your conscience objects, but just a bit less vehemently. Continue in that sin and the conscience is finally reduced to a pathetic, barely audible whimper, and that which once caused great guilt no longer matters. Sin's very familiarity makes it seem acceptable. That's how sin eventually destroys saving faith. That's what brings God's ax.

Doesn't it make you wonder if this is part of the devil's plan – to anesthetize us to *real* and *true* danger by masking reality with pretend. Satan wants no human being to see how sin and unbelief make God our

enemy, let alone to understand the terrifying, eternal consequence of living and dying as God's enemy. He would love us to believe that it's all just make-believe. He would love it if we would just pass over what our text is revealing to us when it refers to **“the stump of Jesse.”** This is the terror of the law, and that fear is every bit as necessary as is the gospel, for the gospel holds no value to us unless the law has first done its work.

Now, however, turn the “man in the dark” scenario around in your mind. How would you feel if what you see in the dark is not some demented enemy but your most powerful friend and ally – the strongest, most capable person you know who also happens to love you more than life itself. Suddenly the very same sight that had just moments earlier filled you with such terror, now fills your heart with safety, comfort, and assurance. All because you suddenly realize that that powerful, fearsome force *is now on your side*. He's not there to harm, he's there to protect. He is fighting *for* you, not against you. Any weapon that he holds in his hand no longer terrorizes, it comforts and encourages. God's weapon, by the way, is identified in our text as his word - **“the rod of his mouth”** and **“the breath of his lips.”** That Word of God is a message of terror for God's enemies, but it yields only peace and comfort for his children.

That's exactly what happened in connection with our relationship with our God. Where once the thought of God watching us and seeing all that we think and do rightly filled us with fear, now that same thought brings comfort and peace.

How did such a change come about? How *could* such a change come about? The answer is the great mystery of the gospel, for instead of pouring out his righteous anger against those who deserved it, God turned against his own Son – knowing full well that his Son had never done anything wrong. All of the terrible things that we clearly deserved where instead visited upon Jesus.

It was as if God himself, after having laid his ax to the base of the tree of Israel, took that ax to what was left, hewed out a manger, and then laid his own Son in that manger. Then he fashioned two rough wooden beams from that stump, fastened them together, and hung his own Son on it.

Israel had been condemned because of their unbelief and resulting sin, but that didn't cancel God's promise. That why the precious root and stump, spoken of in our text, remained. From that root came

new growth, and from that new growth came the Savior of all mankind. Even as he laid the ax to the rotten tree, God preserved his promise and acted in incomprehensible love for sinners.

All of this was necessary because of sin – *our* sin. Before the things described in our text could become a reality; that is, before ***"the wolf could dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child lead them"*** before that could happen the root cause of the problem – sin – had to be removed. That is exactly what God sent his Son to do. That is exactly why God not only laid his ax to the tree of Israel, but why he also preserved its root, and caused that new growth.

Some read the words of our text and think it describes some sort of physical utopia here on earth. That's never going to happen. It describes rather a condition of the heart – the heart where the Holy Spirit himself has taken up residence. Others hear those words as absurd and impossible. How can a bear graze or a lion eat straw? Indeed, something would have to be different than it is now, wouldn't it? Some dramatic change would have to take place. This is, in fact, God's image of the dramatic change that he himself brought about when he sent his Son to satisfy our sin payment. This is God's image of the change that God the Holy Spirit brings to every single heart that he calls to faith in the simple truth of sins forgiven for Jesus' sake. You and I were the beasts, wholly unfit and ill-suited to any peaceful existence. But God changed us.

The world will always believe that man can bring about such dramatic change himself. Though never in recorded history has he been able to do so, the dream remains. Man's dream is, in reality, a nightmare. God waits, patiently. One thing and one thing only appeases his divine wrath: faith in Jesus Christ. You who trust that Jesus has already earned, and thereby supplied, every bit of goodness necessary for you to enter heaven will be saved. God watches over you as your protector and defender. He watches in love; never in anger. He is your best possible friend. On the other hand, all who reject Jesus Christ by imagining that they can, do, or must earn their own passage by their own good works – all such should live in terror, for God does not watch them as friend, ally, and protector. God is then their worst possible enemy. Those tragically misguided souls should be afraid. Very, very afraid. God is the one enemy no one can afford to have.

Thanks be to God that the happy conditions described in our text are already ours through faith in Jesus Christ. God himself has given us this

peace and joy *in Jesus Christ*. You don't need to be afraid of the One who watches. He is, in every conceivable way, your best possible friend. He is the very one who has declared you to be guiltless in his sight – because of what his Son has done in and for you. Amen.

^{ESV} **Romans 15:4-13** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ ¶ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." ¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." ¹² And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." ¹³ ¶ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

^{ESV} **Matthew 3:1-12** In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ 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.'" ⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ ¶ "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 fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501
Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483
Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org
Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 2nd Sunday in Advent – December 7, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 230

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. (Blue Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Romans 15:4-13) Throughout the New Testament it is made plain to us that Jesus died to pay not just for the sins of some (like the Jews) but for the sum total of the sins of the entire world. All are invited to the "wedding feast" of the Lamb of God. The Bible also stresses unity of faith and doctrine in all that we teach and believe. Our infallible guide, as always, is the Holy Word of God.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 88)

The Gospel Lesson: (Matthew 3:1-12) Look with the eyes, but see with faith. John the Baptist was an unimposing sight, but his words carried great power – because they were the words of God. So also God is not impressed with outward actions – which often hide inner unbelief. He looks for faith in the heart – which will naturally produce fruits of faith. This was the message of John the Baptist as he prepared the people for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 34)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 219

"O Lord, How Shall I Meet You"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 1:1-10 (See back page)

"Worst Possible Enemy or Best Possible Friend"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 586

"Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 549

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (18) Average (38) Wednesday (22)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Ben Libby is considering the calls to both Messiah of Eau Claire and Holy Cross of Phoenix. Pastor Em. Michael Eichstadt has accepted the vacancy call to Holy Cross of Phoenix. Pastor David Naumann is considering the call to Trinity of Spokane, WA. Pastor Jonathan Schnose has returned the call to Living Hope of Appleton, WI. The ILC Christmas concert, this year entitled "*Light Born from Light*", is scheduled for Friday, December 19th at 7pm. The venue will again be Messiah Lutheran Church. For those unable to attend, the service will also be streamed live at: youtube.com/ilc.videos

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council meeting originally scheduled for next Thursday has been rescheduled for this morning during the fellowship hour.

Usher/Cleaner/Server List – Please let Phil Pfennig know if you would like to make any changes to the 2026 list.

Christmas Party – Thanks to those who planned and provided for this year's Christmas party. As always, good food and great fun.