

December 4, 2016

2nd Sunday in Advent

Texts for this week's Blended (Traditional) Service:

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NIRV)

Romans 15:4-13 (NIRV)

Matthew 3:1-12 (ESV)

Sermon Outline



New Through God's Spirit - A reflection on Isaiah 11:1-10

Intro – Last week we looked at Isaiah 2 and drew from the text a word about being made new through hope. Today, we look at Isaiah 11 and draw a word about being made new through God's Spirit. This text is rich with Christ and it is HIS SPIRIT that makes us new!

I. A Prophetic Word about the Christ

- a. The text begins with a prophecy about God's chosen one, the Messiah – "... a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." Who was Jesse? He was the father of King David.
 - b. The Spirit of the Lord "shall rest upon him." Whereas God's Spirit spoke to and through prophets and kings, here the Spirit "rests" on him – read, lives with him!
 - c. This chosen one will judge rightly and rule mercifully, ushering in a time of unprecedented peace.
- ✓ **Key Point** – The sermon artwork captures the dual nature of the messiah. He is at once from the line of Jesse (fully human) and at the same time from the line of God (fully divine.) The key verses are those that speak to the Spirit of the Lord. We can say today – as the text is fulfilled in Jesus Christ – that as the Spirit of God rested on him, so his Spirit rests on us today.

II. A Word about Being Made New through God's Spirit

- a. In the appointed Gospel reading for today, John the Baptist says, "*I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" (Matt. 3:11)
 - b. We believe, teach and confess that we are made new by God's Spirit through the Word of God and the application of water in baptism. The very Spirit that rested on Jesus is the Spirit that rests on us in our baptism!
 - c. How does this Spirit make us new? Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord (read, a relationship of fear, love and trust with God). How is this possible? Because in baptism we are crucified with Christ and raised to new life!
- ✓ **Key Point** – The coming of God's Son brings to us the coming of God's Spirit, and this Spirit is of Christ himself! We are made new as we let the Spirit of God in Christ live in us. We are made new by God's Spirit in two ways. First, God declares us to be new creatures for the sake of His Son. Second, as the Spirit of Christ works in us we grow in becoming more fully conformed to His likeness. In both ways – at once, and over time – God makes us new.

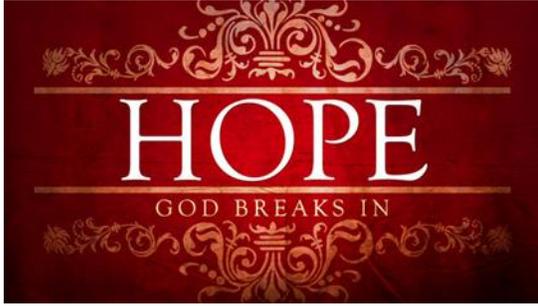
Closing – The Christmas season is a time of giving. What greater gift can we give to another than the gift of Christ's Spirit, as we let Him live in and through us!

All Glory to God alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

December 4, 2016
2nd Sunday in Advent

Text for this week's Contemporary Service: Romans 15:4-13 (NIRV)

Sermon Outline



Made New Through Hope

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. (Romans 15:4)

Intro – This Christmas Season we are drawing focus and inspiration from the appointed psalm for Christmas, Psalm 96. The key verse is a familiar one – “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!” Our emphasis is on being made new in Christ. During Advent, we focus on the coming of God as we prepare our hearts. Last week, we looked at how the incarnation makes it possible for us to be made new through love. This week, our emphasis is on being made new through HOPE.

I. A Word about being made new

- a. By the power of God’s Spirit in Christ, we are continually being made new – through the trials and difficulties of our lives; through Word and sacrament; through prayer; through the mutual consolation of the faithful that is the church; and through witness and service in his name.
- b. In our Lutheran Christian tradition we especially emphasize that we are made new in baptism – by the power of God’s Word and the application of water, the Spirit of God creates in us new life.
- ✓ **Key Point** – The incarnation points us to the new birth that is ours through baptism. And the heart of our new birth is the coming of HOPE!

II. A Word about being made new through hope

- a. What is it like to live with little or no hope? Basically, it’s akin to not living at all! Hope, whether voiced as such or not, is the belief that, beyond this present moment, there is another moment that will be better. It’s the heart of our faith – if anyone is in Christ, the old has gone and the new has come!
- b. A story of being made new through hope – Wilson’s story
- ✓ **Key Point** – The story of our Lord’s life is one that invites us, and empowers us, to live with hope. He came into the world as a homeless person. He fled from persecution as a refugee. He was rejected by many, including his friends. He suffered horribly. He died a criminal’s death. He was buried in someone else’s grave. AND YET, at the end, he rose from the dead! All this – God with us – so that he could, also, be God for us.

Closing – We are given new life through faith in Jesus Christ and, each day, we are being made new as God’s Spirit works in us. This is our HOPE. And now, having been made new, we are called – to the extent that we are able – to be God’s instruments to bring hope to our world, through witness and service in his name.

All Glory to God Alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

This is Wilson's story.

He's a fictional character so he bears no resemblance to any real person. His story, however, may well resonate on many levels. Because while the details are fiction, the essence of the story is quite real. It's a story of suffering and redemption. It is about living without hope and finding such hope in a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Wilson is now a mature man. When he was a young adolescent, he was abused by a friend. He buried that experience deep in his psyche because it was simply too painful for his awareness. As a young adult he married a delightful young lady with whom he fathered two children. But when those children became adolescents he struggled mightily. So much so, that his marriage ended in divorce and he became separated and distant from his children. Throughout his life he battled feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. The end of his family only made things worse.

Wilson started to self-medicate. He had feelings he didn't know what to do with and he had an overwhelming sense of failure. He ended up at the city mission, homeless and alone. Confused and on the brink of hurting himself, he went for a walk in the cool night air.

On his way, he ran into another man, also out for a walk. The man he ran into seemed to be equally caught up in his thoughts. Wilson struck up a conversation – "Kind of odd to be out walking in this neighborhood on a cold night." The man replied, "yep, it sure is. I was just thinking about my wife and kids and how I miss em." Wilson commented that he missed his also, thinking that perhaps they had something in common.

The other man then said, "One year ago today they were killed by a drunk driver – right about in this place where we're walking." Wilson was taken aback – he felt shame over his own drinking and shame over why his family had left him and he thought to himself, "Well this conversation's over. I sure don't need this."

Then the man said, "it was my fault. I had a fight with her and she took the kids and left in a hurry. I'm pretty sure she wasn't thinking about driving or paying attention to the car in the distance. If I hadn't been so selfish that night she and my children might be alive now. "

Wilson wondered what to say. He was so full of his own stuff he really didn't have room for someone else's sadness. The other fellow then surprised Wilson and asked him what he was doing out there. Wilson didn't at first know quite what to say so he just said they left him. And then he said that he had pretty much given up on life.

The stranger said that was how he felt earlier in the year. Then something happened to him. He heard a story about a man who had suffered death at the hands of his friends. And that he did it for them. The stranger said it made no sense to him so he learned more. He said that he found out about Jesus and how Jesus gave his life for people that didn't care at all about him. But he cared for them anyway. And even more, he forgave them for what they did.

The stranger then said, "That's when my life changed. I'm out here tonight thanking God for giving me something I had lost altogether – hope. I came to believe that God can forgive the worst people and if he could do that, then maybe he could forgive me and I could forgive the driver of the vehicle that took my family away forever."

Wilson was dismissive at first but it gave him pause. He went back to the mission that night and over the next few weeks and months began to learn about Jesus. Eventually Wilson joined the church and was baptized. As he grew in faith, he also grew in hope. He sought the help of professional counselor and over time was able to find understanding of his life.

He didn't get his family back but they did start talking again. Above all, Wilson found hope. What he thought couldn't ever happen did – he came to believe that he could go on and live another day.