

“Stand as a Signal”

Advent 2022 – “The Hope of the Prophets” – part #2

Resource from umcdiscipleship.org

Isaiah 11:1-10

[title slide] *Welcome, opening prayer.*

Last week we started a new series called, “The Hope of the Prophets.” We began reading from Isaiah, whose prophecies preceded Christ by 600 hundred years. Isaiah’s people were looking for a messiah, a savior who would usher in a kingdom of peace and justice. We lamented the violence in our world today, and we talked about the invitation Jesus gives us to climb the mountain of God and find restoration for ourselves and this world.

Today I want to specifically focus on Jesus as our righteous judge. Isaiah’s world, like ours, was full of corruption and oppression of the poor. His people looked for a messiah who not only brought freedom, but also ruled fairly and squarely.

[courtroom] Have you ever stood before a judge in court? I can vividly remember the only time I testified before a judge. It was in a juvenile courtroom during a hearing for a young man in my youth group. He was accused of stealing prescription drugs from his grandmother and selling them at school. Although it was his first offense, the whole situation was troubling. How the judge decided would have life-long ramifications. Several family members and church friends came to the hearing, many of them giving character-witness testimony. I remember standing there, shaking, carefully choosing every word. I said, “Your honor, my request is simply that the action taken by the court is just and appropriate for the type of correction this young man needs.” I didn’t say, “He’s a good boy. Please let him go.” I also didn’t say, “Throw him in the slammer.” It was really hard, but I trusted the judge would make a fair and righteous decision. The young man was sentenced to a weekend in jail and then community service, with the promise that if he stayed clear of the law until he reached 18, this offense would be removed from his permanent record.

Some people in the room disagreed with the judge’s decision, but in hindsight, I thought it was reasonable. I can’t imagine what I would have done had I been in his seat.

[church windows] What do you envision when you think about Jesus? Do you see a child in a manger? Do you see a man walking on water? Do you see him dying on a cross, rising from the dead, and ascending to heaven? We read those stories over and over in the Bible, and they are good, but there is one image we probably don’t consider as often: Jesus as the perfect, righteous judge. Yet, the Bible also describes Jesus that way. Just listen to these two scriptures:

[Matthew 25:31-33]

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

[Revelation 20:11-13]

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.

The Bible indicates Jesus comes as the perfect judge. He has the right to judge, because Jesus is God incarnate, God in the flesh, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15). Jesus was born to rule, so to speak.

Look again at Isaiah’s description of the messianic judge.

[Isaiah 11:3-5]

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth...

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Jesus doesn't judge on rumors, first impressions, or hearsay. In fact, Jesus doesn't really judge on evidence or testimony like an earthly judge. Jesus sees perfectly into the heart. He sees our actions and our intentions. He knows us, before we speak a word.

[Jesus and earth] Imagine yourself standing before that kind of judge, one who knows everything about you. Would you be quaking in your shoes? I would be.

That is why we need Isaiah's vision of Jesus, perfect in his righteousness, the Spirit of the Lord resting on him. In fact, with Jesus as the world's judge, there is absolutely no fear in the world. Wouldn't it be nice to be in a world where justice was always served? Better yet, where courts weren't needed at all?

According to Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus is so perfect, Jesus impacts all of creation, including the natural world. Fear and conflict are obliterated. The wolf lies with the lamb, the lion with the calf - the fattened calf, actually; the one ready to be eaten. That's a picture of perfect peace; even conflict in nature disappears in Christ's reign. In the Upper Peninsula, we would probably see the wolf playing with the moose, the coyote and the deer napping together, the cougar and the elk playing cards, the bobcat and beaver sharing breakfast. Can you picture that world? It might be hard to see it now, but this is the heavenly vision Isaiah saw. It was real. It is real.

The question we face today, 21 days before Christmas, is how do we make that vision of peace part of our reality?

[gavel and hearts] I would offer this simple invitation: Take yourself out of the judgement seat. Let go of the gavel. Too much of our lives is spent judging ourselves and judging others, and comparing ourselves to others. Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 2:1, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” Let go of all that. Let Jesus sit on the throne, and let him judge you.

Does that sound scary? It might be. Yet the Bible indicates this reality is for all of us. We will all have to answer for what we’ve done in this life. 2nd Corinthians 5:10 (ESV) says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

[wooden cross] When we stand before Christ, I believe we will have two options. First, we can try to defend ourselves, offer our excuses, plead our case and hope for the best. Or, we can surrender to Jesus and trust in his grace, his sacrifice on the cross, to save us from ourselves. Mac Powell sums it up beautifully in this song:

One of these days we all will stand in judgment for
Every single word that we have spoken
One of these days we all will stand before the Lord
Give a reason for everything we've done
And what I've done is

Trust in Jesus, My great Deliverer
My strong Defender, The Son of God
I trust in Jesus, Blessed Redeemer
My Lord forever, The Holy One, the Holy One

Can you trust in Jesus? If Christmas is about peace, if Christmas is about taking care of the poor, if Christmas is about Jesus, then the first thing we all need to do is get right with God by trusting in Jesus. Let Jesus replace our fears with hope, our anxiety with peace, our greed with generosity. Let Jesus replace our anger, hatred, and mistrust of others with acceptance, love, and unconditional forgiveness.

Is that hard? You bet. Yet Jesus, our judge and our savior, has done immeasurably more for us. We were the broken, rebellious children, the ones fighting in the back seat on the way to grandma’s house, figuratively speaking. And Jesus stepped into this world and died on a cross so that we could be free from sin.

[title slide] As we turn to communion, don’t let this opportunity pass you by. Read the words of confession with sincerity. Open your heart to Jesus and let

him come in and change your life. Stand under his banner, as Isaiah says. People like banners – our teams come crashing through them when they take the field. Flags rally us to a meeting point, helping us identify who we are and whom we’re with. Where we really need to stand is under the cross. Let the cross be our rallying point.

Today, as you receive his body and blood, tell Jesus you trust him enough to be your judge, and trust him to show you the love, grace, and mercy you need.

Let’s pray.

Memory Verse: Isaiah 11:10

“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.”

Reflection Questions:

1. How does our worship reflect our decision to live in God’s new kingdom?
2. How do our prayers, songs, conversations, and treatment of one another show that there is something different here?
3. Do we live in anticipation that all people will be free, not just us?
4. Do we see Jesus as our righteous judge and desire to live in his peaceable kingdom?
5. What will you do in response to Isaiah’s vision and the invitation of the Savior, Christ the Lord?