

Isaiah 11: 1-9

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

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek 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 around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 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.

It Takes a Child to Raise a Village Rev. Charles Schuster June 5, 2011

That comes from what is called First Isaiah. Isaiah's broken up into three sections, three different authors, most scholars think. This first section is from chapters 1 to 40, generally thought to have occurred prior to the exile, when the people of Israel were taken out of their land. Chapters 40-55 continue the period of exile and the remainder of the book the prophet Isaiah is Israel's return. This was a time that was a perilous time. They worried about their future very much, and the prophet is telling them, you know, there will be a future, and there will be a time when there is peace. You may not see it now, but there will be a time, and a little child will lead us.

When he was a child, when his mother was pregnant with him, Pam contracted an infection. The doctors told her the baby would not make it. They said he would be born dead. The best thing, they said, the safest thing was to terminate the pregnancy and Pam said no. His father said, "If my son is born alive, I will dedicate him to be a preacher. I will raise him up to preach." He lived, but he isn't a preacher. He is very religious, he lives pure, he works hard, but he says, "I'm not a holier-than-thou kind of person, if you knew me. I'm a people-pleaser. I love people to like me. I don't do drugs, never been arrested, I don't curse. In fact, when I'm frustrated, I say, "Holy sweet cheese and crackers." He set up a fund to help children who had a hard time in coming in to life and their early years. He is the winner of the Heisman trophy, quarterback of the nation's best team when he was in college, the University of Florida, and he's a Bronco, and he's Tim Tebow, and he almost died before he was born. His father promised to raise him up as a preacher. Tim Tebow would never forget how he came into this world, and he did try to make a difference, and to express his faith.

This morning I would like to discuss with you three men who have helped form our faith. I could have chosen women, and some day I will, but these are men. The first one taught us the importance of striving, and open doors. Isaiah said, "A little child will lead them." A boy was drawn out of the water, and in fact his name, "Moses," means to draw out. He was of a people who were no people. They were what was called Habiru, a word that means left over. They were left over people, not claimed people. Moses was one of those people, and they were not liked. Authorities wanted to do something about their birth rate and so they decided to kill children of the Habiru, and his mother put him in a basket and she laid him in the basket in the bulrushes to float down the river to safety, or maybe death. He was saved by the daughter of the king and raised by the king, thinking he was somebody. And he had this burning bush experience, and he had this burning passion in his life, to lead his people, to help them strive, to open a door for them. He was a leader.

One of the leaders of our church, Bishop Will Willimon, when he was in college, he was in officers' training school, and he was at Fort Bragg. It was summer camp at Fort Bragg. Mosquitoes and gnats and drill sergeants, not necessarily in that order, in terms of their annoyance. He writes, "I remember the day I had to lead a platoon of these college students through an imaginary mine field. It was a sort of test of our military leadership ability. I must have missed the class where we studied mine field crossing, because I had not the slightest clue what to do, so I told my platoon to march across the field with a positive attitude. When the exercise was done, the sergeant called me over, in a tone of infinite contempt, and he said, "I hope you're happy, Mr. Joe College. According to my calculation, you just lost fifteen of the twenty men in your platoon." And I replied, "Sergeant, I'm not a professional military man, but in your informed opinion, would you say that is good or just average?" What the sergeant said cannot and should not be repeated in church.

How do you lead an army of people through a mine field? How do you lead a life that reaches for something? How do you lead your people into the wilderness with a sense that they are God's people and that God is with them? Moses led his people out. He headed them for the Promised Land, and they became the chosen people. He gave them the law, but more than that, he gave them the sense of their importance. He convinced them that they were chosen people, chosen people. They became chosen people, but how? By striving. They became chosen people by striving, and that, I think, speaks to all of us. It speaks to all of us who think we are nobody, and lets us know that we are somebody. Any time we think we don't count for much, we think of Moses and we are reminded that we count for more than we think, as long as we are striving to open doors. We are chosen people who have a task to do, and each of us a part of something important. We have the law behind us. We are somebody. We know how to act. We know what to do, even if there are those around us who think we don't know so much.

It's all about striving, and a little child knew about it as a child and grew up striving to be somebody to the point that he saw himself as chosen, and God said, "Moses, speak to the people," and Moses said, "But I have a speech problem. They will not hear me." And God said, God didn't say it quite this way, but I can imagine, "Look, your idiot brother will interpret for you." And Moses said, "You can't be serious. You mean Aaron?" And Moses

said, "Let my people go," and Pharaoh said, well he didn't say it quite this way, but you know it was kind of this way, and Pharaoh said, "When pigs fly. When the river turns red. When the grasshoppers come and eat the crops, and when I've got frogs in my bed." Striving. We look for what we have not seen, believing it's there. Striving we reach for what we have not attained, believing we have a chance. Most of our striving does not lead to arriving, but we get our identity by our striving, like Moses, his people discovered the chosen part of their journey when they realized life is not about being somebody's slave. When they saw that safety and protection does not match the vulnerability of risk, never has. When they saw how people can tell us how to live, but it isn't life until we choose to live it.

And they saw that striving means falling down and failing, yes, but getting up and trying again. It means winning and reworking our victories and rising to a new challenge, simply because it's there. It means remembering and holding fast to the past, and understanding having a selective memory that forgets what has become a bad dream and not dwelling on it. It means working hard until you're dead tired to the point that you never felt more alive. It means standing up and speaking loud when you're being told to sit down and shut up. This may be the only sermon in the world that's ever been preached that quoted Tim Tebow and George Carlin on the same point. But George Carlin had it put on his tombstone, it says, "Gee, he was here a moment ago." Moses never made it to the promised land, and he isn't remembered for arriving. But gee, he was here just a moment ago, and he is recalled for his striving to open doors, and so are we.

If it were all about striving, we could conclude that we would never arrive, and that we would in fact come to see that we have worked and worked and worked, never having a sense of accomplishment or achievement, and we would have therefore lived our life without noticing the things that we should see. It's also therefore not about striving, it's about waiting. Isaiah said "A little child will lead us." Ken Davis lives in Golden. He speaks to various groups. He was invited to speak to 500 managers of a Fortune 500 company ten minutes before his speech notes for his speech on the 9th floor the speech was given on floor 1 so he ran into the elevator, Indiana Jones-like, pushed the button, ninth floor, looked at his watch, elevator reached the 9th floor, it stopped. The door never opened. It sounded like it opened, but the door never opened. Nine floors below he was imagining he would be introduced, there would be polite applause, then there would be silence, then there would be murmuring. Trapped for weeks on the ninth floor in the elevator. Archaeologists would find him years later, seeing nothing but a skeleton slumped in the corner. He pressed the "open door" button. Each time the elevator would shake, but the door didn't open. He kicked the door. He said something like, not exactly, something like "Holy sweet cheese and crackers." Something like that he said, and then he yelled, "Call the front desk, call the police, the elevator door is stuck" But from behind him, a timid voice squeaked, "No it ain't." It was one of those elevators that had doors in the front and the back, and the door behind him was open and there were about fifteen people waiting to get on, but observing his behavior, not sure they wanted to. He never noticed.

Open hearts. There comes a time in life that is about waiting. And a little child shall lead them. And there was this one who came to teach us that. Like Moses, they said. He was endangered. The king put a price on his head. People were looking to kill him. His parents took him to Egypt. He, like Moses, came out of Egypt. It's in Matthew's Gospel. They said he was the son of God. They said he brought God down to earth. He said life is a life of waiting. He waited thirty years before he acted, and then it was incarnation and his flesh was God's word, and the word became flesh and dwells among us. Waiting isn't passive. Waiting is searching for the spirit.

Remember United flight 23211? 111 people died in Sioux City, 185 survived? One of our church members survived, Martha Conant. Al Haines was the captain. 185 survived. This was a part of the cockpit-tower conversation. "If you can't make it to the airport, sir, there's an interstate that runs on the east side of the airport." "We're passing it right now. We're going to try for the airport." "You are cleared to land on any runway." "Roger. You want to be that particular? You want to make it a runway, huh?" Waiting for the best choice. A plane that was impossible to control, because of an explosion on board. Dumped all its fuel, and found a cornfield. A cornfield. 185 people survived, one of them is one of us, and she runs, is the convener of our adult program. She's a life coach, and she's a mystic, and she teaches people, all of us, to wait, to stop, to listen, to look, to hear, to see.

Jesus brought waiting into the world. He brought patient waiting, the need to know that life is filled with God events, holy coincidences that come every day, and from every direction. He took a Passover meal and he made it a sacrament. He took a short speech on a hill and made it a classic filled with Beatitudes that have become attitudes that help us become present to the present. He waited until he was thirty to act, and then he acted out his role of healer and worker of miracles to help us know how to heal what is hurt, and to see miracles that happen every day. Even at a wedding. Even at, perhaps, a funeral. Maybe even when a farmer goes out to plant seed, or when a crippled man sits by the pool and the water bubbles, or he waited for a woman to touch the hem of his robe and his heart. He waited for Lazarus, and Lazarus died, and he brought him back to him and to life. He waited because he knew all about waiting for God, because he knew that God is not waiting above us, but God has come down to us, and is hoping we will notice in the intimate parts of our lives and the corporate communion with the saints. He waited with the Pharisees until they could see about the spirit of the law as more truly representative of the law than the letter of it. He waited because he knew that life after birth happens, even as he is best remembered for life after death. He waited on the Last Supper, when his friends got together and he got a bowl of water and he got a towel and he washed his disciples' feet while they waited and wondered why he was waiting on them.

It doesn't take much effort to learn the art of waiting, just enough patience to know that life unfolds, and most of the time it's worth waiting for. He waited to be saved when he was arrested, until one of his friends pulled out a sword, and that's when he realized if you live by that, you're going to die by that. He waited on the cross for someone to take him to a safe place. It was then that he realized that everybody has some kind of cross, and from the cross is the best vantage point to wait, to see, and to hear. He said we are the

light of the world and that we shouldn't hide it. Open your heart to the mystery. If you can't find a runway, find a cornfield. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, waiting. Open hearts. It works for us.

Open door - we strive. Open hearts - we wait. A little child will lead them. Open minds - thinking. John Wesley is important to us Methodists. When he was a child, his parents got into a fight, and he almost died in a fire. His father was a preacher. Samuel supported the king of England, William of Orange, and Susannah supported James the Second, the deposed king, and most of his congregation supported James, and Samuel would preach sermons about how they should have thought in a different way politically, and the congregation, the rumor has it, became angry with him, and so they decided they would teach their preacher a lesson, don't do this here, and they decided that and went to his house, the house of the preacher, and tried to burn it down, and all the Wesley children escaped except for John and a farmer came by and saw the little boy in the window, and the neighbor saved his life, and Susannah said it was like a brand plucked from the fire, and Susannah and Samuel made up. Near-death puts all differences of opinion in perspective, don't you think?

A farmer saved his life. A Moravian worship service saved his soul. A German reformer opened his heart to the grace of God, Luther, and a Jewish convert showed him important things. John Wesley, our founder when he was a child, a stranger, an uneducated farmer, saved him, and he got the idea then that we must avoid what Stacy Plemmons, who is a member of our church, calls "terminal certainty." That we can learn from each other, and we do not know it all. This past Thursday, the church directories came. I've seen some really strange church directories in the time I've been a pastor. There was one church directory where the photographer told every church member to say the word "prunes" right before the picture was taken. He thought it would be funny, and would make people laugh. It didn't. It made people pucker. It's a church directory of a thousand people, and pictures looking like something smelled bad.

Our directory made me think of two things. First of all, I've looked it over, I realize the influx of new people since the last directory was printed, and therefore all the new ideas, all the new thinking that's going on, there is no terminal certainty here. The second thing that is remarkable, and you'll want to hear this, you know most pictures in church directories look worse than our driver's license picture, have you ever noticed that? It's true that some church directory pictures are worse than the pictures that are taken by those police vans that catch us, take pictures of us when we're violating the law. Pictures in this church directory are really better pictures than the people whose pictures were taken. That's my... you look at it and see if you don't think that's true. We don't look as good as the pictures made us look. Don't come burn my house down.

That's not a bad thing. I mean, if we look at the pictures in the directory, we will see a book full of beautiful people, and if we think of a congregation filled with beautiful people, then we will think of each of us as one, and all of us as beautiful people. And beautiful minds. And everyone, therefore, brings something to each. No one should be slighted or silenced or ignored. Open minds means our minds are not made up, means

that we listen to each other. To realize everyone has something to help, as we think. And it's not in regard to the amount of education any one of us have had. Open minds begin with an attitude to the people who will be open to our thoughts and new ideas as we will be to theirs. John Wesley knew it. His heart was strangely warm. "I care not that your creed," he said, "is my creed. But if your heart is as my heart, give me your hand." And maybe he got tired of hearing his parents argue over politics, because he didn't think those kinds of things are important. And he held out the idea that we think and let think. And maybe he saw wisdom in that farmer who saved his life, because Wesley believed in grace. He believed in God's grace that comes to us at birth, and he believed in God's grace that comes to us in our awareness that we fall short, but that we can be forgiven. And he believed in God's grace as we grow in faith. As we tap into reason and scripture, and tradition and experience. He almost died as a child, but he had an open mind, and he taught the mystery of thinking and learning and the little child will lead them.

Last Sunday in the children's sermon at 9:15, I asked the children, it was Memorial Sunday, I asked them what they could remember, and I asked them if they remembered being born, and one little girl said that she did. She said, sort of. She said, "I remember that because they videotaped it." I asked if she'd like to bring the videotape or the DVD to the church some time, and we'd show it on the big screen during the worship service, and she said she didn't think that would be a good idea. Well maybe not, but when you stop and ponder it, what happened to Moses and Jesus and Wesley when they were children, we know that affected them deeply, and that, because it did, has raised us up to see the importance of striving, of waiting, and of thinking. Of open hearts, open doors, and open minds. We think so much of that is important that we put it on a banner, and ever time you come in or go out the east doors there, the hallway of the church, you're going to see it. Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors. It takes a child to raise a village, still. A little child will lead us.