

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.

Things are growing; there is life and we are alive. Jesus is alive. ... Trees and wheat – all kinds of things are growing in God’s world.

Our Living Branch Jesus is the vine growing within us today.
Isaiah said: A shoot from a stump? It is probably not a very familiar image to people who grew up in the city or suburbs.

According to the Bible, Jesus is a shoot, a branch, a living, growing thing that grows, despite humanity, violence, and any worldly interference.
The image was familiar to the people of his day, and likely is to today’s rural folks.
The power of life remains. And it insists on growing again, of producing a tree again, of producing fruit again. That is the picture of Jesus as Messiah that the prophet Isaiah writes about.

So:

*A congregation got some funds together to blacktop and expand their parking lot. A larger lot, to the back of the building had been a covered a gravel area that had gotten kind of weedy over the years. The black toppers came in and just covered the area, assuming the hot asphalt would finish off the plants that had been growing there. And for a while the new parking lot looked fine. Until spring. Although most of the plants were discouraged by the several inches of blacktop put on top of them, **one was not**. Not the dandelions. They pushed right through the new covering as if it was not there.*

Now there is a shoot even those of us who grew up in urban areas can understand. We may not grasp the image of the shoot out of a stump, but we get the image of the dandelion. There is a remarkable new life. Almost indestructible, the dandelion shows up every spring (much to the chagrin of many a lawn owner) and covers the world with its yellow glow. You can freeze it, walk on it, chop it, cut it, cover it, and even poison it, and still, every spring—there it is again.

If there ever was a resurrection flower, this is it. The dandelion should remind us that the coming Christ is more than a heart-warming and wonderful story. That new life born in a stable, laid in a manger was not simply a quiet blessing to be remembered during the dark days of the year.



That gift was the powerful new life promised by the prophet, waited for by the dreamers of Jesus' day. There was the new life that could not be denied. Jesus came, a miracle of life. Jesus came, the Messiah. Jesus came and brought all the gifts that God had promised in the old covenant, bringing together all the gifts of the new covenant.

Here is life and salvation. Here is the grace of God we need as we stand among the dead hopes and dreams of people who can't seem to figure out where to look for God with us (Immanuel, God with us).

Jesus brought life and salvation. He was the very gift that could not be denied.

And he comes to us again. It is not enough to admire the manger scene or cherish the old songs and carols of Christmas. The coming is a powerful mystery. The Child of Bethlehem is Immanuel, the very presence of God among us, the God/man came to offer us the free gift of salvation, sprung as new life out of the eternal love of God for you and for me. His life that goes to the cross, that pays the price of our sin, that brings the only life that has meaning for us now and into the future. The gift that promises heaven and life with Jesus eternally. And it is the living vine in our lives today.

So, we have something to celebrate. We have a reason for our joy. And it is not Christmas trees, or wrapping, or presents or decorations—we celebrate the miracle of God with us. A gift that could not be denied, came as promised, brings us all that God has in store for us.

So, we rejoice. We pour out our songs and words of praise for the miraculous gift that God is giving to us, to each of us, to every heart that looks to the new life Jesus brings. Happy Advent, a blessed Christmas. Jesus comes—and we cherish our God-given, undeniable gift.

Jesus is quoted in the Gospel of John:

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

