A shoot from the stump of Jesse
Isaiah 11

Last Wednesday Jas and I went to see a show at the Entertainment Centre
Hugh Jackman put on a solo show
(when I say solo it was him and a cast of about 150 back-up performers)
And the night consisted of Hugh Jackman singing his favourite show tunes.

One tune that was included
was a song from *Carousel*, the Rogers and Hammerstein musical.
The song he chose was called *Soliloquy*.
Soliloquy is quite a long song performed by the character Bill
when he discovers that he is going to become a father.
After deciding that the boy will be named after himself,
Bill imagines what this son is going to be like:

He'll be tall and tough as a tree, will bill! Like a tree he'll grow
with his head held high and his feet planted firm on the ground
and you won't see nobody dare to try to boss or toss him around!

I don't give a hang what he does as long as he does what he likes!
He can sit on his tail or work on a rail with a hammer, hammering spikes!
He can ferry a boat on a river or peddle a pack on his back
or work up and down the streets of a town with a whip and a horse and a hack.

It's the kind of song that many would-be parents can resonate with,
Here is a soon-to-be-father wondering what might be in store for baby.

But there is one class of parent who never had to wonder.

When we open the Bible we find heaps of stories about parents and their kids;
and some of those parents give birth to children
who come attached with words of prophecy.
These parents are not left wondering what their child's future would be like,
Instead they receive words which foretell what the kid would grow up to do.

On example from the Old Testament: Samson.
Before he is born an angel announces to Samson's mother that
he will deliver the nation of Israel from their enemies.

Move into the New Testament and we see that
John the Baptist's parents are foretold about his career as a prophet.

And then of course there is the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary the mother of Jesus.

Now if ever there was one kid who had his life's work planned out before him
then it was Jesus.

In fact, the prophecies about Jesus started way before Mary and Jospeh's time.
When we flip back into the Old Testament we see that
the career of Jesus was spoken about centuries beforehand.
This is why in the gospels we hear Jesus using the word "must" a lot:
I must go to Jerusalem.
I must be handed over,
I must die and be raised to life again.
Why? His work was determined by God's word thousands of years earlier.

And so this year, in the month of December,
I thought we would look at some of those Old Testament prophecies
that foretell the coming of Jesus at Christmas time;
Prophesies which speak not only of Christ's arrival
but also of what he would come and do.

Our first prophecy we heard in our first reading, Isaiah 11.
And among the predictions we find in that chapter is the claim that
Jesus would grow up to be a *spirit-filled king*.
Isaiah 11.1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

In the previous chapter Isaiah has been speaking about fall of ancient Israel.
Once a great and proud nation,
God's people will soon be overrun by their enemies.
If once they were like a forest full of trees,
soon the axe will be swung and Israel will be no more than a field of stumps!

"But", Isaiah continues, "one day a shoot will emerge from one of those stumps.
One day there will be new life emerging from what remains of Israel."
And that stump sending up that shoot will be the stump of Jesse.

Who was Jesse? Well, Jesse was the father of King David.
We read about King David and his Father in 1 and 2 Samuel.
So the Stump of Jesse is referring to the royal family of Israel.
And the promise here is that one day that royal family line will re-emerge.

We read in the news this last week of a member of the Russian Royal family
Who died under a tree in the Northern Territory.
He was living in caravan, his true identity a mystery until after his death.
He died a long way form any palace, a long way from Moscow.
But imagine if there was some kind of prophesy which said that
the Russian royal family, the Romanovs, that
they would one day re-emerge and kick out Vladimir Putin.

Well, that would be remarkable, wouldn't it? It would seem impossible!

But this is the type of prophecy we have here in Isaiah,
and the New Testament makes the claim that Jesus is that new shoot.

Our second reading was from the opening verses of Matthews Gospel,
the opening verses of the New Testament.
Have you ever wondered why the NT begins with Christ's family tree?
Have a listen as to who we find listed there:
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of ***Jesse,*** **6** and ***Jesse*** the father of ***King David***. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, **7** Solomon the father of Rehoboam and so on.

Matthew is telling us: Jesus is this shoot who has sprung up from Jesse's family!
He is the rightful heir; he is the King who will re-emerge from obscurity!

I wonder how seriously you take this idea of Jesus being a king.
Sometimes I think it's very easy to think of Jesus in one dimension:
Yes. He was an interesting teacher,
Yes, he was a good humanitarian,
Yes, he died for my sin and leads me to eternal life,
But you can think all those things about Jesus and still miss something.
Is he your King?
Is he the one whom you seek to obey, in every single facet of your life?

This is a much more challenging Jesus than the one we might imagine.
And faced with this picture of *King Jesus* we might find ourselves thinking
"I'd rather be my own boss thank you very much,
I can make my own decisions, set my own direction"
And I can understand that response!
Self-autonomy is a much more attractive way to live.

But before we decide to shirk back or turn away from Jesus,
just have a listen to the type of King that Jesus is:
Isaiah tells us in v 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

If there is one thing we want our leaders to be, it's to be wise.
It takes wisdom to know what to do about the Middle East,
It takes wisdom to know what to do about the needy,
it takes wisdom to know what to do about the economy.
The promise of Isaiah is that Jesus will grow up to be a wise King.

And again, the Gospel writers take the time to point out how this was fulfilled
Luke tells us that even as a young boy,

everyone was amazed at Jesus' understanding; He was a wise individual.

So if we ever find ourselves having doubts about who it is we're following,
If we start wondering whether it's worth staying loyal to the King,
Then remember that Jesus is a *wise* King; his path is the path of wisdom.
The devil will try and fool you into thinking otherwise,
that it's better to strike out on your own,
but don't be fooled, listen to Isaiah again,
it's upon Jesus that the Spirit of wisdom and understanding will rest.

Moving to the next part of our chapter,
we see that Jesus would grow up to be an agent of justice and of peace.

Right along side our leaders being wise we also want them to be fair!
We expect them to prosecute the guilty and uphold those who are vulnerable.
Well, this is exactly what the king described by Isaiah is like
In v4 we read that this king will judge the needy with righteousness
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth
And the guilty will also be held accountable:
With the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked

And it's no surprise that in the NT the Gospel writers pay attention
when Jesus upholds the needs of the vulnerable
and castigates those who are oppressing them.
The Gospel writers are making the point: "Jesus is this King!"

He's also the king who will bring peace.
From verse 6 we have a series of wonderful images
where natural enemies are living at peace with one another.
The wolf will live with the Lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat ---
did you see the news item during the week of the goat
that was found in the tiger's enclosure at a Russian Zoo?
Zookeepers found the two together and they'd become friends.
Usually the tiger would eat the goat, but not in this instance,
hence it found its way onto my newsfeed. Very unusual.
But this is what we can expect with King Jesus in charge.
The calf and the lion and the yearling together,
and a little child will lead them; enemies will put down their weapons

This sounds wonderful!
Imagine a world where peace and justice ruled instead of violence
Where there was no need for people to become refugees or to call the cops.
And so if Jesus is this king, and if he has indeed come,
Then … why is the world still such a mess?

Here is the newspaper headline from a publication called the *New York Daily News*
It's confronting, and controversial!
In response to the latest round of Gun violence
the headline screams out *God isn't fixing this!*

The paper is actually making a sensible point
They're criticizing those politicians who are willing to offer prayer
but who are not willing to change their country's gun laws.
The suggesting that perhaps prayer isn't the only thing they could do!

But I wonder whether, taking it at face value,
this headline is what many people think when they look at the world.
If God is so great and powerful, why doesn't he do something?

Well the king has promised that he will return,
and that it's on his return that he'll finally establish justice and peace.
You need to think of Jesus like Aragon in *The Lord of The Rings*
Or Aslan in the *Narnia Chronicles*.
He's a king whose final moment is yet to come,
and in the meantime there will be evil forces that we have to contend with.

Those forces can be held in check by good governments –
a point not lost on the editors of the *New York Daily News*
and we Christians have a responsibility to pray for and lobby our politicians,
or perhaps even enter politics ourselves
so that justice is upheld and so peace is promoted,
but the final answer will only be found when the King makes his return.

So here's another challenge, do we trust the King when he asks us to be patient?
There are voices in the world, clever voices, atheist voices,
who look at the world and say "there is no God!"
But the Jesus prophesied by Isaiah
is a King who cares deeply about the world,
and so it might just be worth sticking with him.

Perhaps 'sticking with Jesus' is too weak a way of putting it!
As we look at the final section of our passage
we see a prophecy of people flooding towards Jesus.
Verse 10: In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples;
the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

And in the next verse Isaiah is clear that this throng of people
will be made up of all different races: from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.**12** He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

And again, the Gospel writers are very careful to note that
Jesus himself reached out to people of many different backgrounds:
He spoke with women from Samaria and Phoenicia
(these are lands outside of ancient Israel):
he healed a Roman Centurion's son;
he sent his disciples to reach out to all nations.

But crossing boundaries is never a straightforward affair.
Before anyone rallies to Jesus' side a way has to be made for them first.
Isaiah uses geographic imagery to make this very point
Skip down to v15: The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea, with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. **16** There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.
God himself will remove any barrier that might stop someone coming to him.

Sometimes when you are out driving along a freeway
you see little bridges made out of netting
stretched from one side of the dual carriageway to the other.
They're special bridges built for wildlife so that they can cross in safety.
In the news this week I saw that in Japan they've build little tunnels so that their turtles can cross from one side of the railway to the other.
For those animals to find safety someone needs to build a path for them,
they can't do it on their own.

And so it is with us: God himself has to cut a path for us.
That path, of course, is the work of Jesus on the cross.
His blood removes our sin - barrier keeping us from God -
so that we can heed the call and rally to his side.

I wonder whether the Jesus contained in these prophesies
matches the Jesus we have in our imaginations.
Sometimes parents have a set picture of who their child should be
and problems can emerge when it becomes clear that
the child is actually someone very different.
Is the Jesus we desire the same Jesus as the one we meet in the Bible?
Do we know him as King? As the trustworthy and fair King who is calling us?

The final challenge for us then is to decide whether or not we will heed that call.
A path has been opened up for us, will we come to him or will we stay put?
Coming to him will mean, in the words of the thief on the cross,
that Christ will remember us when he comes into his kingdom.
It will mean seeing justice done, it will mean experiencing peace.
But we'll only receive these things if we come to him saying
"Yes Jesus! Be my savior! Yes Jesus, be my King!"