

Roots and Shoots

*A ray of hope flickers in the sky
A tiny star lights up way up high
All across the land, dawns a brand new morn
This comes to pass when a child is born*

*A silent wish sails the seven seas
The winds of change whisper in the trees
And the walls of doubt crumble, tossed and torn
This comes to pass when a child is born*

*A rosy hue settles all around
You've got to feel you're on solid ground
For a spell or two, no one seems forlorn
This comes to pass when a child is born*

*And all of this happens because the world is waiting
Waiting for one child
Black, white, yellow, no one knows
But a child that will grow up and turn tears to laughter
Hate to love, war to peace and everyone to everyone's neighbour
And misery and suffering will be words to be forgotten forever*

*It's all a dream, an illusion now
It must come true, sometime soon somehow
All across the land, dawns a brand new morn
This comes to pass when a child is born*

700 years before Jesus, Israel, for 40 years, had lived in fear of their neighbours from Assyria. Their neighbours regularly raided their land, invaded their homes, carried off their people to be slaves in their foreign land. People who had farms and settlements had them ransacked and their means of livelihood destroyed.

Isaiah the prophet looked out and saw that Israel was now a stump; a shadow of its former glory. The glory days of King David were well in the distant past.

Living under those excruciating circumstances, it would not be difficult to imagine that the prophets and priests would be singing songs of lament.

But Isaiah, the good news prophet, saw a bright future. This future came in the form of a child; He didn't focus on the stump of Israel and throw his hands in the air and say *that's it we are all doomed...its over...look at us!*

No Isaiah saw beyond the stump to what God was doing.

Isaiah 9 v6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Isn't it wonderful, that God chooses to come to this world, not as a powerful leader, but in the form of a baby, of a child; a special child, a shoot that comes from the line of King David. God chooses to become weak and vulnerable, to be born into poverty, in the womb of a young girl, to be the Saviour of all mankind.

This is the advent message; The Kingdom begins with a child, a baby, and Isaiah's vision goes even further, "The wolf will lie with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion will feed together and who will lead them, a little child will lead them." Is 11 v6

What a curious picture he paints!

It is something that Jesus picks up on several occasions, "Unless you become like a little child you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" "Let the little children come to me for such is the Kingdom of Heaven".

A child! weak, utterly helpless, will lead the new order, will lead the new Kingdom.

It's not going to be those who think they are strong, wise or filled with their own self-importance, who are going to lead the Kingdom; no, a new thing is happening, and the Kingdom will be led by a child.

It sounds crazy! But this is God's way!

Isaiah is encouraging them – not to focus on the stump, but that in the future, everything will be totally different; there will be peace and harmony and no one will be under threat, there will be no more danger, everything that has cost danger has gone, people will live in peace, those who were once enemies will live beside each other, they will feed each other, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God and a little child will lead them.

When we look at the Church, what do we see? Do we see the stump, the past which is gone, or do we see do we the roots and shoots of what is yet to come, for our attitudes will determine the future of Cadder church. It's in our hands?

Children are not just part of this new Kingdom, but children will lead the new Kingdom.

Children have priority in this Kingdom. That's what I hear from Isaiah the prophet.

Growing young emphasises, the importance of prioritising children in our churches; building a church around our young people.

This is what the independent churches are very good at. The question is often asked, why do these churches attract young families, and the answer is simple, they prioritise their church around the young people.

One pastor of over 40 years said, "Everybody rises when you focus on children and teens". "Young people are like salt. When they are included, they make everything taste better."

Our Cadder growth plan, which will be discussed at our Session tomorrow evening, has grown out of Growing Young and the 5 Marks of Mission, which the Church of Scotland has adopted, and it has an emphasis on nurturing our younger generation. It's a plan of growth for the future. It's roots and shoots!

I don't need to tell you that the Church of Scotland is facing massive challenges today; it has never encountered such a challenge. Ministries

have been halved in the last 20 years; now the focus will be on the cull of church buildings. The picture of the stump comes to mind. Cut back, cut down, cut out and we're left with a stump.

If our focus is on the stump, then we are literally stumped! We are as good as finished.

But if our roots are in the mercy and love of God, then we shouldn't be disheartened, because God is doing a new thing; for the roots of our faith go deep, and if they are channelled into the mercy and love of God, as Isaiah's was, as King David's was, and see God as our Shepherd, who is with us in every eventuality of life, then we have nothing to fear.

Isaiah reminds us today, that from the roots of Jesse, which is the root of King David, a branch which will bear fruit.

God's Church today needs his people to focus on the roots and shoots, not the stump. We are good at focussing on the stump, for that's the easy part, but how good are we at focussing on the roots and shoots.

Where do we see green shoots in our church?

Well, I see it in our children and young families, and if you are here regularly on a Sunday you must see it also, particularly if you are sitting downstairs. I was at the Cadder Kids Christmas Party yesterday, and it was a lovely day, with mums and dads and small children – children who have been baptised into Christ – children who come to this church with their parents – parents who want to be here – and children who enjoy being together.

This is a green shoot. It may be fragile, but it's a green shoot. One that needs great care and nurture but it a sign of hope for our future.

I see green shoots in our youth organisations. Our Girls' and Boys' Brigade are showing many signs of green shoots. Many little shoots that weren't there a few years ago.

Yesterday morning, Susan and I had a cycle along the canal path, heading towards Lambhill, and when cycle we love to observe the different seasons – we remarked how barren the landscape now is as we enter the season of winter, but we know that in a few month's time, come January and February, we will begin to see green shoots for under the surface, there is new life stirring.

On this advent season, where are you focussing your faith; are you focussed on the stump, which is a past that is now gone, for if you are, then the church will die, or can you see something new, something exciting, something stirring, can you, like Johnny Mathis, like the prophet Isaiah, like our Lord Jesus, catch a glimpse of the potential of a child, of our Cadder Kids, our Girls and Boys Brigade, of children and young families, leading us forward into a world of challenge and change, but a world that they need as we do, the gift of faith? That's the challenge that the prophet Isaiah lays before us this morning; where is our focus? Is it on the stump, or is it on the roots and the shoots? For if it is then Cadder Church still has a future.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen