

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent A**  
**Lis Valle**

**Lectionary 4:**

Isa 11:1-10 [Peaceful kin-dom from the Jesse stump]

Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17 [Justice shall flourish]

Rom 15:4-9 [a community in harmony glorifies God with one voice]

Matt 3:1-12 [prepare the way of the Lord]

**Possible preaching themes:**

- The king-judge with good judgment skills and biased toward justice (Isaiah, Psalm)
- Giving life to elderly and sick persons (Isaiah, Matthew)
- Leading the people of God with ancestral wisdom and being well rooted (Isaiah)

**Possible scientific resources:**

- **King-judge biased toward justice**
  - How does the king-judge in Isaiah 11 and Psalm 72 reflect evidence of good judgment as leader and justice maker?
    - Judgement is at the core of exemplary leadership;  
<https://hbr.org/2020/01/the-elements-of-good-judgment>
    - According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, the king-judge exercises moral judgment based on ethical principles that transcend the self and social convention that seek the good of everyone.  
<https://pdx.pressbooks.pub/humandevlopment/chapter/moral-development/>
  - Young and adult humans both fall prey to judgment biases but can learn to overcome these. If the king-judge stays biased toward justice the poor and the oppressed will be the beneficiaries.
    - [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254080896\\_The\\_Development\\_of\\_Judgment\\_and\\_Decision\\_Making\\_During\\_Childhood\\_and\\_Adolescence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254080896_The_Development_of_Judgment_and_Decision_Making_During_Childhood_and_Adolescence)
- **Giving life to those seemingly dead**
  - Applying the logic of Matt. 3:10 to living in capitalist societies suggests that many humans unable to generate income or otherwise be "productive" citizens (those experiencing old age, debilitating illnesses, or disabilities that keep them from generating income) are deemed as burdens. The science of stumps without leaves suggests that communities keep alive the seemingly dead because it is convenient, but convenient for whom?

- Trees sharing nutrients with the stump benefit from maintaining the stump's symbiotic relationships with helpful fungi.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/science/tree-stump-alive.html>
  - Several organisms work together for the benefit of the forest.  
<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2211209-tree-stumps-that-should-be-dead-can-be-kept-alive-by-nearby-trees/>
  - The forest creates a healthy community that is of benefit to everyone.  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mother-trees-are-intelligent-they-learn-and-remember/>
- **Leading the people of God like stump sprouts**
    - The memory of the trees is stored in the trunk rings and DNA of the seeds.  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mother-trees-are-intelligent-they-learn-and-remember/>
    - Stump sprouts have access to resources stored below ground and benefit from the extensive root system of the stump. <https://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/11/11/1130/htm>
    - A stump keeps its symbiotic relationships with helpful fungi.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/science/tree-stump-alive.html>

### **Homily outline: *Stump Sprouts***

- **From King to Kinship**
  - The “root [or stump] of Jesse” is a reference the former shepherd David who served in Saul’s court and later became king of the Israelites. In some Christian traditions, Isaiah 11 has been read as a prophecy about Jesus as a descendant of David. This interpretation focuses on Jesus as King. Rather than focusing on David’s or Jesus’s kingship, which reiterates imperial domination, a *mujerista* approach focuses on kinship and Jesus as kin. <https://ewc.com/kingdom-kindom-beyond/>;  
[https://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/insights\\_fall\\_2021\\_i/s/13746319](https://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/insights_fall_2021_i/s/13746319);  
<https://www.redletterchristians.org/the-kin-dom-of-god/>
  - A decolonial approach to the text values many other aspects of the poetic metaphor. For example, a shoot that comes out of a stump, or “stump sprout,” has access to ancestral memory, symbiotic relationships under the soil and communication networks between trees through the stump’s root system.
- **Ancestral memory**
  - Ancestry is important to establish kingship rights. Ancestral memory passed down from stump to sprouts is also essential to help the next generations to survive and thrive. A tree’s memory is stored in its rings and records the growing conditions of previous years, including speed of growth and lack or abundance of water. This memory gives the offshoot important knowledge to live and adapt to its environment and to grow and flourish.  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mother-trees-are-intelligent-they-learn-and-remember/>

- While reading Isaiah 11 points to a Christian imaginary in which Jesus will return as King to judge, interpreting the offshoot as if it was Jesus may alternatively point to the new life that Jesus brings. David became king bringing ancestral knowledge of shepherds and rural living, of music to heal the soul, of trust in a higher power that would give him victory in battle without an armor. Similarly, Jesus is kin with ancestral knowledge of Jewish rituals and faithful living, of priesthood, as well as the conditions of being poor, and desiring reversals. Instead of instilling fear of judgement, stump sprouts are the reason to celebrate ancestral knowledge transferred to the next generation giving them wisdom to live and thrive.
- **Interconnected roots**
  - Stump sprouts of many tree species have access to and benefit from the extensive root system of the stump. Through the root system of the stump the offshoot establish symbiotic relationships with fungi, soil nutrients and water, and a communication network with other trees. All of these, necessary for a tree to grow and thrive, are still accessible to the offshoot. These scientific findings point to expanding previous knowledge of trees as competitors for light and nutrients to knowledge of trees as a community that collaborates for the benefit of their ecosystem. [see the links regarding “stump sprouts” above under scientific resources, also [https://www.cell.com/iscience/fulltext/S2589-0042\(19\)30146-4?returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS2589004219301464%3Fshowall%3Dtrue#relatedArticles](https://www.cell.com/iscience/fulltext/S2589-0042(19)30146-4?returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS2589004219301464%3Fshowall%3Dtrue#relatedArticles);
  - While aboveground stump sprouts may look fragile and vulnerable, underground they are deeply and widely rooted. If ecologist Suzanne Simard is right in asserting that forests are not collections of isolated organisms but webs of constantly evolving relationships, then a stump’s sprout in a forest is part of that web. The offshoot is not growing as an isolated organism but as part of a community that literally and physically nurtures it and protects it from erosion.
  - From this perspective, Isaiah 11 becomes a beacon of hope, not only for a peaceful kingdom after the day of judgment, but also hope in that offshoot that is already rooted and belonging in community. The stump’s sprout is strongly connected with its kin and surroundings.
  - The good news in the text may be reframed away from a single organism that is a great king and into a new member that emerges out of an already established collaborative community that thrives on symbiosis and synergy, which fosters biodiversity, which leads to stability and resilience. The stump’s sprout will grow connected because it is rooted and will keep and pass the wisdom of its kin.

**Tags:** ecology, forestry, King David, moral development, trees

### **About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions

science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary

cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.