

I've presided at *funerals* where young *children* were present.

We can easily be thrown into *despair* over thoughts like:

This child will never know his grandfather –

*Or worse – his own **father** or **mother**.*

But *despite* this terrible *grief*,

The *narrative* does *not* have to be one of *despair* and *death* –

But one of great *hope* and *life*.

And *knowing **who*** we are – at the ***root*** –

The very *core* of our being –

Embracing our deepest roots in God –

Brings us life – especially when our hearts are experiencing *drought*.

That little child at a *funeral* –

Is a great *sign of hope* – hope that life *endures* and *overcomes* even *death*.

Hope keeps us *connected* to our *roots* –

The root of *all* life is *God's* life –

Our lives are but an *extension* of *His* – given in true *love*.

Our *hope* helps us to keep *focused* on what matters *most* – especially when things seem *bleak*.

The little *child* moves us to *live* in that hope –

He gives *strength* to the one who *loves* –

I've seen mothers who've lost their children's *fathers* –

And it's hope in that *child* that gives them the strength to persevere –

And even to *rise* from the darkness into a restored *light*.

This light of *hope* –

A hope – *incarnate* – in that little *child* – so *filled* with the promise of *life*.

We *begin* the second week of Advent today.

Our life's *journey* is *itself* an *advent* journey –

Living in *hope* of the life of *another* little child to take *root* in the desert spaces of our *hearts*.

May our hearts be set *afire* with hope in *Jesus* as our *Messiah* and *Savior*.

They *burn* but are not *consumed* –

They cast a great *light* –

That *defies* darkness.

Isaiah speaks of the *coming* of a new messiah –

When it seems the *glory* days of the great Kingdom of David is a distant *memory*,

Of a life *lost* – and nothing but a dead *stump* is left of it.

Some days we wake up and look in the mirror and all we can see is a dead *stump*!

Some look at the *church* and see a *stump*!

But *then* there sprouts a little *shoot* –

A sign of *life* – a sign of *hope* keeps us *going*.

New life *comes* – even from places that we’re tempted to give up for *dead*.

And a *little child* shall lead us –

Making His dwelling *glorious* –

His light *shining* in the child Jesus –

A light shining in the *little ones* –

An *earlier name* for a *Christian*.

May we *let* Christ’s *peace* come to *rest* –

Deep in our *rootedness* as God’s *children*.

May we *dare* to hope in Him when all else fades into darkness.

Cherish the roots of life and love –

The roots of *family* and *faith* –

And their *fruits* –

An abiding *peace* amidst life’s *storms* –

An abiding *light* – amidst the *shadows* of our fragile existence.

The more we *tend* to the *roots* –

The better our *branches* can spread –

Bearing the *fruit* of Christ's love offered by *our* example and invitation –

Especially to those who in their despair or cynicism –

Want to take an *ax* to the precious *root* of our share in God's life in our humanity.

So let us say *yes* to tending that little *shoot* from the old *stump* –

Say *yes* to faithful love of God –

And God's love and mercy for us *all* –

Including those we prefer to *avoid* –

Those we behold with a *vengeful* heart –

Those we look *down* upon.

May we work to come *together* as *one* light –

A light *from* God – directing hearts *back* to God.

We have a new *bishop* as of this past Friday – Bishop *Mark*.

The *least* I can say about him is that he's quite *competent*

to shepherd God's people in the Albany Diocese –

Which is *overrun* with distress and fatigue and *woundedness* these days.

But He *sees* with the heart of *Christ* –

And He sees much *more* than an old *stump*!

His heart has been *seized* by this *compelling* love of Christ –

Who has *placed* him in *our* desert spaces –

So that a new *shoot* – a new *hope* shall sprout *forth* from our deep roots –

Beneath that *dead-looking stump*.

He is *one* with us now –

And *his* determination –

His faithfulness –

His love and even his *laughter* and his *tears* –

Will be for us –

For the *Christ* that is *dying* to live *from* our *little old hearts*.

Let us *not* give in to the *ax* poised against our divine roots –

The *ax* of *despair* or *cynicism* or *bitterness*.

Let us *cultivate* those roots and the *peaceful* branches of this Kingdom of God *among* us –

Coming to us in that little *shoot* –

That little *child* –

Into the heart of *every* little child of God who says *yes* Lord!

Come Lord Jesus – and *shine* in our hearts.