

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2The 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. 3His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 4but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 6The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. 7The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 9They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. 10On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

I want to talk about a word. Not some Greek word or Hebrew word that will open our eyes, but a word that every one of us here already knows. But if you are like me, though you know the word you don't know it at all.

The word is understanding.

Until last weekend I knew all about this word. To have understanding is to see the whole, the complete situation and to comprehend it all. To have understanding is to see things as God sees them, to look down and grasp connections and relationships.

Understanding.

But last weekend I read a book that took apart this word, understanding. Standing under. Not over standing, taking a place where God would be and seeing from above, but standing under.

If I understand another I do not look down, as one who would judge, but I see that person's reality from below, as they see it.

This is like what another book I read a long time ago suggested. If you want to understand a small child, put your arm straight up in the air for twenty minutes. For that's how it is for the child, holding hands with Dad or Mom on the trip through the mall.

"Look at me when I speak to you," says the adult. Do you want to know how that is. Talk to another adult who is standing on a chair for ten minutes. Notice how your neck starts aching as you strain to keep eye contact.

Understanding comes not from standing above, but going below, down under the reality that another knows.

Understanding. Standing under.

You never understand what it is like until it happens to you. How many times do we hear these words? The widow, the cancer patient, the Aids victim, the abused child, the alcoholic. Until I stand under the affliction I do not understand.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

Israel would get a king. God promised. When there were no more kings, budding forth from the family tree of David, when the tree was chopped down and only a stump left, Israel would get a king.

The Lord's spirit would rest upon him, a spirit of understanding.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

We always think above is the best place to see. High in the stands, far above the playing field we see the whole picture. Last Sunday at the Browns game, up in the upper deck, all around me sat people who knew more than the players and coaches what should be done. Yet how different it would seem to feel the body jarred by 250 pounds of muscle crashing into me.

In our minds God is way up there, seeing the whole picture. Where else would God be.

But when God sought understanding of the poor, of the meek, he stood under the stares and comments of the haughty with them. He was oppressed by the soldiers, the religious, the rich with them. He stood under suspicion, disdain, hunger and thirst, betrayal and death with them.

Jesus is this shoot of Jesse, son of David and also Son of God. God in Jesus understands. He is not looking down on you, judging you as one who has never walked in your shoes. He stood under all that you stand under, Every fear and anxiety that you know, he knew.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The spirit of understanding.

When you were baptized God's people prayed for this same spirit for you. A spirit of understanding.

Standing under with the poor, standing under with the sick, standing under with the abused. God wants people with the spirit of standing under.

I think we've had it all wrong. We think the best place for God to see is from above. Our human wisdom says the best place to know is from above. God is the one who knows everything before it happens our wisdom tells us.

God is the one who makes rules that will be for the best for everyone our wisdom tells us.

God is planning and directing and controlling our wisdom tells us.

If that is the way God is, then we should be like God, viewing life from above, setting out rules, planning and directing and controlling the less enlightened.

But God sent his Son not to be a ruler, a Lord and master but a servant. God sent God's Son to be born not in the palace but in the stable. Not among luxury, but among need.

God sent his Son to stand under, that he might gather a whole people of under standers, and make the world new through them.

Look at it this way. What do you want from me as an ambassador of Christ? Do you want me to be the wisest one in town who will tell you what you should do? Do you want rules and directions and planning from me? Or do you want one who respects your judgement, your wisdom, God's Spirit in you? Do you want in me, your pastor, over standing, or understanding?

What you want in me, is what your brothers and sisters in Christ want and need from you. They do not want you to be one above them, sitting in judgement over them. They want a companion in you. a SISTER, A BROTHER, A FRIEND. The poor and the meek do not want you to be one who will tell them what they should do, how they should live, but one who will walk in the cold with them, share a coat, a hat, a lonely night.

Understanding. Think of Jesus every time you hear the word. Think of Jesus who stands under with you. And join him in standing under with your neighbor. Amen.