10.25.26 ~ Pentecost 22
"A Spiritual Harvest"
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Assurance

Isaiah 11:1 NIV Pew Bible 595

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 NIV Pew Bible 671

5 "The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.
6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.

Leader: These Are the Words of God. People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

John 4:31-38 NLT Pew Bible 925

31 Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something."
32 But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about."
33 "Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other.
34 Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. 35 You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36 The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! 37 You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. 38 I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

Leader: These Are the Words of Jesus. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:
Generous and loving God, we are here again to worship, hear your word, learn, and have fellowship with you and one another. We thank you for a beautiful week of living, working, praying, serving others, and celebrating our purpose. We came together as a Missions Center to welcome a new partner, celebrate the gifts of reading and books, and to serve and be in community intergenerationally. We admired your artistic handiwork in the brighter colors of leaves, birds, sunshine, and bright blue skies overhead. We thank you for all you provide us and our Food Mission; for these blessings we are grateful. We thank you for the Baptist

associations of which we are a part. Thank you for the fellowship of other pastors and congregants. Help us to invite others to know you and to meet you here. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Again, I say Happy Autumn! It has been another full week! Thank you for your continued staff prayers. Mason District Supervisor Jimenez welcomed the George Mason Friends of the Library to our campus with a ribbon cutting of the book donation bin, made some future voter connections with the daycare children, and sends his greetings and good wishes to us as a church and Mission Center of organizations serving our community. He and his staff were delightful; we had about forty (40) people attend on Monday morning, so they are now operational. We averted a bird crisis, turned the heat on for winter, finished up the budget preparation and drafted reports for next week's Annual Membership Meeting, got vaccinated, welcomed Roudaina back to the office, Ruby back to the Virginian, and yesterday, hosted parking for the Annandale parade and DMV Asian Night Market, volunteers carried out the Food Mission, and I met online with MACBF for a 2027 Clergy Care team brainstorming session! God is working on so many levels, and that's just here! You all are Jesus' hands and feet in your own neighborhoods, so thank you for your input and contributions to all of what we do. We are seeing fruit grow on the branches of the trees we've planted over the many years. In addition to the physical fruit harvest, we are seeing a spiritual harvest touching many lives in subtle ways. Let's keep growing!

Our first two passages are usually read around Advent or Christmas, but they set the tone to close out our Roots and Branches theme for 2026. We only have a few more weeks until Advent; be praying about our

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theme for 2027 (it hasn't revealed itself to me yet!) When we read these words, from our perspective we think of Jesus. But for the Hebrews reading or hearing the prophecy, every monarch of the Davidic dynasty was an anointed representative of Yahweh and was a sacred, semi-divine person. Keeping in mind an ideal messianic age not there yet, the individual fulfilling the terminology of "King" or "Lord Our Righteous Savior" from our passage was automatically considered God's adopted son and Messiah. The writer and prophet Isaiah had in mind a specific king with superhuman wisdom, power, and a just rule, which might also define our view of the Messiah; that is why it is so appropriate at Christmas.

Now, scholars have debated Jeremiah's passage authenticity, but it is still messianic in tone. Jeremiah views the Messiah King not as a conquering military hero, but also as a just and righteous King of the Davidic dynasty. This prophecy projects the vision of a safe Israel which has not happened yet but is to come. There is yet another coming from that same lineage as David. God described David as "a man after My own heart," choosing him to replace King Saul. He united the twelve (12) tribes of Israel, captured Jerusalem, and made it the nation's political and spiritual capital. Jeremiah's prediction was that this branch would bear fruit to prosper and benefit others. In Hebrew, there are five or six words for branch, some botanical and others symbolic with broader meaning; *netser* is used in Isaiah as a tender, young shoot (indicating the Messiah's incarnation,) but *tsemach* in Jeremiah and Zecharia is not botanical and refers only to the "Righteous branch" or coming king. Although we interpret Jesus as this righteous branch, the ultimate spiritual harvest will

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come when Jesus returns again. “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.”

In our second passage, we are starting toward the end of the story of the woman at the well, but it is important to remember her part. She is a Samaritan woman who comes later than the other women who gather water because of her sinful condition and Samaritans and Jews do not mix together; she has had many husbands and men in her life. When Jesus greets her, he knows her situation and condition, and she is at first ashamed but knowledgeable about the prophecies of a Messiah to come. So, Jesus chooses to reveal his sonship, God’s forgiving love, and the power of salvation to her (I am “living water”). When the disciples arrived, he had not eaten or drunk the well water. He had just had a divine encounter with the woman and was neither hungry nor thirsty. Like the woman at first, the disciples were thinking materialistically about where to get food and his need to quench his thirst. But Jesus clearly states he has no need of harvested food because God’s will would be his sustenance. Jesus’ priority is spiritual: doing the Father’s work was both his meat and drink.

The signs and the teaching revealed Jesus' identity and his Father’s character to both the woman who would then share it with the Samaritans and to the disciples who were still trying to grasp his purpose and divine role. The harvest imagery is eschatological; that is, having to do with end times and Jesus’ second coming, even though they did not quite understand it. Therefore, he used the terms Sower and reaper in several ways in these few verses to create a common image easier to understand. Since Jesus is completing his Father's work, presumably the Father would

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be the Sower and Jesus the reaper, yet in speaking to the woman, Jesus is both Sower and reaper. The harvest has already begun.

Farmers must prepare the soil, water, fertilize, sow the seed, and then wait four months to reap their harvest. Jesus tells the disciples and I say to you, look around to see the fields already ripe for harvest. He was speaking of the Samaritans who were ignored; they wore white and looked much like fields turned white ready for reaping. Which are our fields ripe for the harvest? Yours and our church neighbors? Family? Involvement with our Missions Center partners? Even if you're uncomfortable sharing the Gospel with others, you can prepare the fields or fertilize or plant the seeds. First, we must pray for hearts to be opened to Jesus and to this church as a place to seek him. We must become a praying church for the lost or the none's, those who have no interest. This passage reminds us that it is not our sole responsibility to convert, but we are to work in tandem with the Holy Spirit to help transform lives and share our testimonies with others. Jesus tells them to notice to see people with spiritual hunger, like a wheat field of the spiritually curious. The harvest is not just for a metric or number of baptisms or church members; this important spiritual harvest out there is to guarantee eternal life, both the transformed and yourselves. Faith comes by hearing. Faith comes by hearing the stories of Christ and how he changed your life. God will give you the words to say; your lives already speak volumes, but we need to pray for the harvest. God will do the rest. Sometimes, Christ can unfreeze a hardened heart by your generosity or your sharing your stories of blessing. Ruby's return to the Virginian was amazing; she is a rock star there, because of who she is spiritually and the friends she has who model

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Jesus' kindness and generous spirits, like Debbie and Elmer. People stopped in to welcome her back from the hospital just to be around her. This was not just personality; I could see their comfort and joy that she was back. It is because she emanates the spirit of Christ; they may not be able to explain why they love her so, but her spirit is contagious. They missed her. May we be even half that bold to share our faith like she does! Look around for the fields ready to harvest! Amen? Amen. ||

***Please pray with me*:** Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us through your Scriptures each week. May we never forget that you have called us into relationship and service. Empower us to share our faith stories with others. Help us to stay close to your word and world through our actions. Give us words to build others up. Keep our eyes upon you and your mission; guide our steps. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

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