

Just for a moment, I want to take you back to a slow news day in 1993. A local newspaper photographer captured an image of a wild fir tree growing out of the cracked pavement of a Philadelphia highway. Neighbors and motorists in passing had adorned it with a few modest ornaments, and the image of what they called “the Christmas weed” did the early 90s equivalent of going viral. Unfortunately, the photo caught the eye of the Department of Transportation, who considered it a potential traffic hazard and scheduled it to be cut down.

Their Scrooge-like response created a community outcry. A reporter wrote a sentimental fable about it that was well-received by the general public. Twenty-five years later, Claymont celebrates the Christmas weed with an annual parade of cheerleaders, marching bands, and fire trucks. The lady who organizes the festivities, said this, “We say it represents Claymont. We’re not pretty, but we’re plucky. We’re resilient, and we keep coming back.”

I thought about that, and it strikes me that this a perfect symbol of Christmas. You see, what we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. But the reality is he didn’t make as grand an entrance as we would expect. His entrance wasn’t the least bit pretty, but it was plucky. His entrance was so different from what everyone expected; his own people didn’t recognize him. And yet, today, kind of like that Christmas weed was celebrated in Claymont, his birth is celebrated around the world.

The strange thing about this is people should have known, especially God’s people. For centuries they’d read their ancient Scriptures: the law, the writings, and the prophets. One of the prophets was Isaiah, who lived 750 years before the birth of Jesus. He prophesied during a time when God’s people were worshipping idols rather than the true God. God had delivered his people from bondage in Egypt and brought them through the wilderness into the Promised Land. They became a nation and built a temple for God. But they soon strayed from God’s word and fell into idolatry.

So God raised up prophets like Isaiah to speak to them. Isaiah told them they’d soon be conquered by a foreign nation called Babylon. Their temple would be destroyed, and they’d be taken into exile.

But into this crisis, Isaiah also prophesied hope for God’s people. There was still a future for them. At the center of Isaiah’s prophecy

was a mysterious figure called “the Servant of the Lord.” That Servant is depicted in four “songs” found in the second half of Isaiah, and when you read these, it becomes clear no one could fulfill his shoes but the Messiah himself. One of those “servant songs” is found in Isaiah 42:1-4.

**“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring justice to the nations.  
He will not shout or cry out,  
or raise his voice in the streets.  
A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;  
he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.  
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”**

### **Jesus is the Servant of the Lord**

The really interesting thing about this is if you fast-forward 750 years, Matthew, one of Jesus’ disciples, quoted this about Jesus. Jesus had just healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The religious leaders were incensed over this, so much so it says they “plotted how they might kill Jesus.” Jesus was aware of their intent to kill him. He could have exposed them right then and there. He could have challenged them. He could have fought back. You’d expect that from a king. But, instead, it says Jesus withdrew from them, and when a large crowd followed him, he healed many, and then he warned them not to tell others about him.

Isn’t this rather strange behavior? I mean, he could have fought back. He had unlimited power, right? He could have started a riot. At least, with so many people on his side, he could have organized a march on Jerusalem, or maybe called for a public debate. But that wasn’t his way. He preferred to do his work quietly and without a fuss. Matthew gets how this might be hard for us to understand, so he reaches back and quotes Isaiah 42.

Matthew repeats what Isaiah said because Jesus is that Servant of the Lord, the coming Messiah-King, who would not be what anyone expected. Everyone expected this King would come with power and crush Israel’s enemies. But they had it wrong. There

are three things we see in this prophecy about this King named Jesus that no one expected.

### **Jesus is a Servant King**

The first thing is he'd come as a servant. We see this in verse one, when God says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold." Yes, he'd be a beloved servant, a Spirit-filled servant, and a servant in whom God delights, but he's still a lowly servant. He didn't come to be served but to serve. What kind of king does that? This is like the CEO of a multinational company, knocking at your door and asking to wash your car.

And what did this servant come to do? It says, "He'll bring justice to the nations." Justice means making what's wrong, right. The world is bent. Creation is broken. My goodness, just read the news. There's so much that's wrong, so much corruption, but he'll overcome all of it. He won't quit until the job is done. And he'll do this not just for Israel but for all the nations. His is a worldwide mission. Isaiah later said this servant would be a "light for the Gentiles."

Now that's what we'd expect a king to do — bring justice. But the really strange thing is while he accomplished the results of a king, he didn't use the methods of a king. When you think of the great and powerful kings of the earth, what do you think of? How do they get the job done? With force! With power! It's like when North Korea's leader constantly touts his nation's advancement in nuclear weaponry. He says they're invincible. He puts everyone on notice.

But that's not how God's servant will get the job done. Isaiah says, "*He will not shout or cry out; or raise his voice in the streets.*" He won't make a lot of noise. He won't make a big deal of himself: "Here I am, King Jesus! Look at Me! Quick, someone call CNN." His work will be done without noise, publicity, or bluster. In fact, as we saw, Jesus went so far as to warn his disciples to keep all the things he was doing a secret.

It's good for us at Christmas to meditate on this infinite contradiction - a King who came to serve. A king who'd bring justice to the nations but do so without bluster. And, as his people, we're called to be like him in this world. We don't have to worry about power and publicity. We don't have to vote for the right politicians or fight for Jesus to get more face time in our public schools. We don't have to try to get our greatest sports heroes to thank Jesus on TV. We can do it his way - quietly, without fanfare and bluster. We can serve people. We can be there when people are at their low and crying for help. We can show them there is a King who came to serve.

### **Jesus is a Compassionate King**

The second thing we wouldn't have expected is he's a compassionate King, a gentle King. Listen again to what Isaiah says, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will

not snuff out." A reed could be used as a flute, a measuring rod, or a pen, but however one used it the whole reed was needed. A bruised reed was useless — beyond repair. You just threw it out and got another. One thing about reeds, they were plentiful and cheap. But God's servant, Jesus, doesn't discard what the world deems useless. It's the same with a smoldering wick. It's nothing but a nuisance. My wife, Lynn, noticed a new Christmas candle she'd lit was smoking and smoldering, and she wanted to take it back. A smoldering wick doesn't give out much light; it just smokes up the room. Snuff it out, return it, or throw it away.

Do you see what this is saying? This servant will serve and restore people who the world would give up on and even throw out. He's attracted to fragile, hopeless cases. Jesus, this powerful and sovereign King, came to bring justice to nobodies who could find it nowhere else.

Are you a bruised reed, weakened, or even defeated by the pressures and pains of life? Are you a dimly burning wick, unable to handle those pressures and pains? Do you feel damaged or discarded? If you don't feel this way now, one day you will. We're fragile creatures. We're all far more vulnerable than we know. Many of us hide our bruises and manage to keep our flames burning in public, but when we're alone, we feel the flame burns dim. Our plight may be complicated by feelings that the bruises are self-inflicted and that we deserve to have our flames flicker. It may be true. Through our sin, we may have brought on the bruises and dimmed the flame. But the Servant isn't put off by whatever caused your condition; he just wants to help.

What's caused your bruises? What's caused your flame to flicker? Maybe like a smoldering wick, you feel discarded, good for nothing. If that's you, a cry for help is enough for King Jesus to respond. Jesus is the Servant of the Lord, who says, "I don't care how bruised and broken you are. I've come to bring you life, rest, and hope." King Jesus loves taking the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks of this world and make them into trophies of his grace.

### **Jesus is a Suffering King**

The third thing we wouldn't have expected is he's a suffering King. We see that in verse four, where Isaiah says, "He will not falter or be discouraged in bringing forth justice on earth." The fascinating thing about this is the word "falter" is the same word he used in verse three for "smoldering." And this word "discouraged" is the same word he used in verse three for "bruised." Do you see what he's saying? The Servant of the Lord will find himself subject to the same pressures and pains of those he came to serve. He'll be bruised, and he'll smolder. His mission to bring forth justice will come at considerable cost to himself, except he won't falter or be discouraged. He'll persevere and accomplish his mission.

Jesus is the King who suffers. He suffered during his lifetime here on earth. He was lied about and slandered. Have you ever been slandered? He was rejected by many members of his own family, some of whom thought he was out of his mind. He was betrayed by one of his best friends. Have you been rejected, betrayed? Jesus understands because he's been there. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin"* (Heb. 4:15). That word tempted means he was tested and tried.

All of this, of course, points us to the cross where justice was won. Because on the cross, Jesus received the just judgment for our sin and brokenness. Justice came at great cost to himself. Later, in one of the other Servant Songs, Isaiah says the Servant was "bruised for our transgressions."

The title of this message is, "All I want for Christmas is Someone to Believe In." Jesus is a King, unlike any other king. He's a Servant King. He's a compassionate King. And he's a suffering King.

And here's the deal, because he's so different from any other king, and because we would never have expected a king like this, it's easy to miss him. It's easy to write him off as a Christmas weed. Born in an insignificant town, to unknown parents, in humble surroundings, Jesus was missed by many. He was overlooked because no one could imagine a king who served, a king who cared for the bruised and the broken, and a king willing to be bruised himself to redeem us.

Today, Jesus can still be missed. Don't miss him. He came to meet your deepest longings. I know there are a lot of reasons to go to a Christmas Eve service that has nothing to do with God. Maybe you're here just to please someone else. Maybe you just feel like you needed some Christmas cheer. Whatever the reason, we all came here with something deep in our heart. We're all bruised reeds. Not everything is what it should be, and we're left with a longing. What is it for you? A relationship to be made whole? To feel financially secure? For your kids to get on the right track?

Whatever it is, here's the thing about that longing; it's something God gave you. Maybe not in the exact form it's in right now, but it signals an even deeper longing for what's wrong to be made right. And the only one who can really meet that longing is this King who serves, cares, and suffered for you.

Lord, we want to pray that this King who came to serve; this King who is so full of compassion that he'll not break a bruised reed; this King who suffered so we might be set free, will meet us in the deepest needs in our soul.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail,  
please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2019 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA  
Catalog No. 1442-3FC

---

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, December 24, 2019 at Central Peninsula Church.

**[www.cpc.org](http://www.cpc.org)**