# Shoots of Grace!

Sermon Preached by Rev. Chuck Cole 11/28/2021 at St. John’s UMC Staunton

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# Genesis 3:14-15

# New International Version

14 So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15

And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3%3A14-15%2C+21%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-71a)] and hers;

he will crush[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3%3A14-15%2C+21%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-71b)] your head,

and you will strike his heel.”

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### Genesis 21:1-7

### The Birth of Isaac

21 Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3%3A14-15%2C+21%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-517a)] to the son Sarah bore him. 4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

6 Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” 7 And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.

A while ago my wife read the book “The Hidden Life of Trees” by Peter Wohlleben. She shared much of what she learned about trees to me and I always have loved trees but the book gave me a whole new appreciation and expanded sense of wonder about trees. They are far more active creatures than I ever before appreciated. Some trees form what are called clonal groves: swaths of forest connected underground by a single network of roots, with each trunk genetically identical to the others. The tree grows and spreads by shooting up trunks. Though for a variety of reasons the conditions in which they grew etc they vary in a variety of ways.

The most famous example of a clonal grove is Pando, a grove of quaking aspen in [Utah's Fishlake National Forest](https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/fishlake/home/?cid=STELPRDB5393641). Its name means "I spread" in Latin. Pando is among the largest and oldest organisms on Earth. Its [47,000 stems](https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/pando-the-trembling-giant) cover more than [100 acres](https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/pando-the-trembling-giant). It has been living and growing for thousands and thousands of years. Scientists who study such things suggest that the trees is a minimum of 80,000 years old but could be as old as a million years.

On the surface you look at Pando it looks like you are looking at 47,000 individuals trees but if you look underneath you see an interconnected system that is in fact one organism.

When I look at a forest now I wonder of what I would have before presumed was a collection of individual trees might instead be in fact one tree like Pando. As I considered this it struck me that in some ways the Scripture is like a forest with Pando or another like tree in it.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books composed over a period of 1500 Years. Some books are poetry, some are hymns or psalms, some are letters, some are books of history, some are books of wisdom, some are prophetic works and some are gospels. Most of the books have numerous stories within them with a variety of characters. Beneath the surface of the Bible is a complex system of connections that tie the whole book together as a witness to God’s love and saving purpose shown through Jesus Christ. Each person that appears in the scripture is like a trunk shooting up out of the ground which comes up from underneath, plays its part, connected to and part of the overall underlying story.

As Christians like those recorded in the scripture we are shoots or trunks of that underlying story and characters with parts to play in the ongoing story that keeps growing and being written. Our role is played in the part of the story written between the letters of the New Testament and the final restoration depicted in the end of the book of Revelation. It has been expanding and will until Christs returns.

This Advent as we start a new Christian year we are going to consider look at births of various shoots of the underlying story in the Bible and see what they have to say to us.

Before we get to our shoot for today God created a perfect world free of pain and death and created Adam and Eve to live with him full, joyous and creative lives. But they at the tempting of the serpent chose to disobey and so were separated from God and introduced death and sin into the world corrupting all of creation. He then announced the consequences of this disobedience to the man and woman and then in our passage this morning the Serpent.

For our purpose this morning Genesis 3:15

15

And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel.”

The seed of Eve will crush the serpents head. These verses point to the singular seed Jesus whose birth and victory is announced here at the very beginning. He is struck on the heel on the cross but in his resurrection he crushed the serpent's head. He reigns now undoing all the damage done.

At the same time it also points to many other seeds, trunks that shoot up in Christ, either beforehand being used to bring about salvation as they play their role in the story of restoration and life. These seeds, those in Christ both Old Testament and New Testament grow up like shoots of Pando to move forward the story of salvation.

Today we consider the birth of the trunk named Isaac the son born to Abraham and Sarah by the grace of God. Isaac is born as a fulfillment of God’s promises. First as part of the fulfillment of his promise to Eve as part of the line that leads to Jesus who will truly crush the Serpent's head and his promise to Abraham that Sarah would have a child in her old age through whom God would establish a great nation through which he would bless the world ultimately in Christ. We see the shoot of Isaac as a visible part of the story.

Isaac was the result of a promise as are we.

Another feature of the shoot of Isaac is that we are reminded in the opening verses of Genesis 21 that the birth of Isaac came by God alone. Genesis 21:1 reads, “The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.” He was not born because Abraham or Sarah did or did not decide to have him and not because of what they did, Sarah was past child bearing years no matter how hard they tried she could not have had a child. Isaac was born because of God’s promise and action.

John 1:12-13 says of us, those who believe in Christ,

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Those who trust in Christ, now, like Isaac are not born spiritually because our parents decided but because of the will of God his good and gracious will for us. We believe and he gives us spiritual birth. Like Isaac each of us is born in Christ, comes to believe because God gave us the ability to believe. In our tradition we call this prevenient grace -grace that goes before - and if he did not act our action would not mean anything. We are shoots meant to trust him to crush the serpents head as we live life in Christ in the kingdom.

Each of us is in Christ is a seed of Eve who is bit by the serpent but also steps on the serpents head if you will as we are faithful. We are each shoots of the underlying tree which like Pando keeps growing and expanding until the day that Christ returns.

Over the next weeks we will see how other shoots and seeds were used and see what they have to say to us as to what our role is to play. Looking to Isaac let us give God glory for his gracious decision to enable us to be a trunk in this story through our spiritual birth resulting from Grace. But we need to remember that we are not random extras, if we are in Christy we are promised seeds and shoots, each intended with a role to play.

This Advent season let us read and listen to see what role we have to play in the unfolding story of salvation. As we begin a new Christian year with the start of Advent let us each look at our background story how we have been born spiritually by grace and what that means for how we play out our role in the script set before us until Christ returns. Amen,