

Sermon Notes: December 18, 2022

Focus: Isaiah

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Advent is almost done, and we are ready for baby Jesus. But we have one more week to focus on adult Jesus. I am going to spend my time talking about Isaiah. Isaiah is the prophet who speaks of a time when all nations will come together to worship the Lord. He speaks of this world in metaphor where the wolf lays down with the lamb (it's a little later than today's lesson but sort of the punchline of today's lesson). In today's reading, Isaiah speaks to a fearful King, Ahaz, who needs the encouragement of a young woman giving birth to the Messiah.

The prophet Isaiah lived in a time of great upheaval and uncertainty that dwarfs our uncertain time in the US. His chapter eleven image of barnyard peace and harmony is a reminder of the kingdom of God's peace and equity that Immanuel (Chapter 7) ushered in. How often do we see the wolf and the lamb lying together in our world today? How often do we see nations coming together in peace and unity? There is hope even in our own world...Let's hope.

Israel was under threat from foreign powers, and the people had turned away from God. They were living as they saw fit - unconnected from a sense of communal responsibility. In this context, Isaiah reminds the people of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

Today, distractions and diversions bombard us. There is the endless radicalization spiral of YouTube. Try it - get on YouTube watch stuff you like and see how long it takes for recommended videos to turn to health conspiracies, chemtrails or communism. It's not just the internet. Cable news hijacks your brain to make you feel smarter than and more fearful of your enemies. These distractions can make it difficult for us to focus on the things that truly matter: loving God, loving people, and not being a jerk.

But this is where the hope of Advent comes in. Amid a world filled with conflict and strife, there is hope of a better future, a future where peace and justice reign. And this hope is not just a vague, abstract concept, but is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ promised in Isaiah.

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has broken down the barriers that divide us and has given us the gift of reconciliation with God and with one another. This is the good news that we proclaim and to live out in our own lives.

What if we delighted in the promise of a coming of Christ and the hope that he brings? Then we might have energy to be agents of that hope in the world. Babies on Christmas - easy. Reconciliation with our fellow adults -- not so much. Advent or Christmas let's pray for the fortitude to bring the love of Christ to the whole mess. The kingdom of God that Isaiah describes *is coming and is already here*. Likewise, and the hope and faith we have in the power of Christ's love *is coming and is already here*.

Isaiah in context Isaiah is a prophet(s) who lived and ministered during a tumultuous time in the history of Israel. He (they) lived during the reign of at least four different kings, including Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. See the next section for why I put 'prophet' in parentheses.

Israel was facing political and military challenges. The nation was constantly under threat from foreign powers, particularly the Assyrians and the Babylonians. These nations were powerful and aggressive, and they posed a serious threat to the security and stability of Israel.

In response to these threats, the kings of Israel and Judah often turned to alliances and treaties with other nations to try and protect themselves. However, these alliances were often unreliable, and they often ended up bringing more trouble than they were worth. (In 2022, Haiti is asking for the US to bring in our military to control gangs; last time it didn't work out so well)

The prophet Isaiah hated the political alliances of his day, and he called on the people of Israel and Judah's King Ahaz to put their trust in God, rather than in the nations of the world. He reminded the people that God was their protector and their shield.

Isaiah also spoke out against the sins and injustices that were prevalent in Israel at the time. He condemned the corruption and oppression that were rampant among the ruling classes, and he called on the people to repent and to turn back to God. (Speaking of ruling class, you know who is funding the gang-related havoc in Haiti in 2022? the Haitian elite. They are responsible for funding terror and even bringing back cholera.)

The book of Isaiah has three main sections:

First Isaiah is comprised of chapters 1-39: Isaiah himself wrote this section. This section contains Isaiah's most famous prophecies, including his visions of the coming Messiah and the end of days. (Today's reading is in First Isaiah)

Second Isaiah chapters 40-55: An anonymous prophet wrote this section and lived during the time of the Babylonian exile. This section contains messages of hope and comfort for the exiled Israelites, as well as prophecies of the eventual restoration of the nation.

Third Isaiah chapters 56-66: A group of prophets who lived during the time of restoration wrote this section. This chapters contain messages of encouragement and guidance for the returning exiles, as well as warnings against falling back into sin and disobedience.

The first section reflects the prophet Isaiah's ministry during a time of political upheaval and spiritual crisis in Israel. The second section reflects the struggles and hopes of the exiled Israelites in Babylon. And the third section reflects the challenges and opportunities facing the returning exiles as they sought to rebuild their nation and their lives.

Love God, love people, be less jerky.

Merry Advent, Todd