

EMMANUEL, our PEACE: God is FOR us (2nd in a Series of 4, ADVENT: a Season of Prepositions)

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:68-79

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, 2nd Sunday of Advent [December 8] 2013

<sup>11:1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

<sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

This is the second Sunday in our Advent series. Last week we looked at the basic translation of Emmanuel: God is with us. Not only the prophecy given, but the last words of Jesus: “Lo, I am WITH you always....” But like radio waves, always present but not always evident, without the right receiver, we ended last week with the idea that fine tuning our receivers is a good thing – spending 15 minutes a day in quiet prayer, and working on the Advent Tasks printed on the tear off section of your bulletin.

Today’s text from Isaiah talks about a new kingdom – not pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye – in the words of the hymn – “when we all get to heaven” *i.e.* as that hymn portrays it: only after we die.

Isaiah is talking about **a kingdom of peace**, which will be **“thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”**

My sermon also notes that we have as scripture **Luke 1:68-79**, because we sang it when we sang **Zechariah’s canticle**, on **Hymnal page 209**. That kingdom of peace, of which Zechariah sings in the first chapter of the New Testament Gospel, is coming to us in Jesus.

Unfortunately too many folks want to take the beautiful poetry of Isaiah and make it literal – unconsciously, most likely – in order to make it seem impossible. Like; **“Yeah, when I see a wolf and a lamb snuggled up against one another, or a leopard and a little goat, THEN I’ll start looking for peace. Until then, I’ll choose to live in the REAL WORLD.”**

So, TODAY, let me break it down, pretty simply to talk about how this prophecy – in Jesus – is able to come in our lives NOW.

**First:** OUR PREPOSITION for the week. In Jesus (Emmanuel) we discover that God is **FOR** us.

Do YOU believe that? Do you?

Because, from what I read and hear and see, there are a lot of people who think Christianity stands for the notion that **God is AGAINST us, unless ....**

Or **God is for us so long as we ...**

And those “...”s are all about how God is **ONLY FOR** us **IF** we do such and such.

**We are born in sin; God is against us unless we ...**

Sound familiar?

**God must condemn us to hell unless we ...**

Sound familiar?

Here’s the radical message: God is FOR us. And we don’t have to DO anything in order to realize it. It’s already done. All we have to do is to accept the fact.

A great many people I know who claim the name of Christian don’t really believe that God is UNCONDITIONALLY FOR US, unless we ...

The apostle Paul could write to his friends in Rome that **“nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”** (Romans 8:38-39) But, too many Christians want to add some conditions to that.

**It’s like water skiing.** How do you get out of the water, on top of the water, and ski? You have to let the boat pull you. You can’t do it yourself. But try as hard as they can -- those who know how it works -- to the first-timer, she or he still almost invariably tries to pull themselves up, instead of leaning back and letting the boat pull.

So long as we keep trying to do something to make God be FOR us, then we will

continue to get in the way.

**SECOND:** Here's **how you can tell is you really believe that God is FOR you.**  
AND **the implications** of it on our **search for peace.**

**How do you define** your **value?** Your **worth?**

Is your value from the **inside out?** Do you realize that **God is FOR you,** **regardless;** that you are a **beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold?**

**OR do you continue to find your value, your worth, in what others think of you?**

**If** you are in the **latter group, then** – and **you really just can't help yourself** – you are **constantly defining yourself OVER AND AGAINST someone else.**

**At least I'm better than so and so,** who does such and such.

I read a couple weeks ago that **most Americans can't go more than THREE MINUTES without making a critical, negative, or judgmental thought about a person or situation around them.**

What do you think?

Now, understand that **what you do some of the time, you do all of the time.**

If you think that you only do this in certain environments, but not others, pay attention. See if I'm not right in what I'm telling you: **What you do anywhere, you do everywhere.**

And **add a little bit of stress into you daily life, and the situation is not going to improve.**

When you are in the **line at the grocery store,** at the **department store,** at the **Walmart** ... and you **look at the people around you** ... not people you know, but mostly people who are complete strangers. **What are you looking for?** What do you **notice?**

**Do you think critical, negative, judgmental thoughts?**

Do you find things about the people around you that **make you look better (in your mind) by comparison?**

That's what happens when **your value is not based** on the **FACT that God is FOR you and that your value comes from within**, and is not dependent upon anybody else's judgment.

**THIRD, AND FINALLY:** When we live lives that are based upon (a) comparison, (b) competition, and/or (c) judgmentalism of others, in order to obtain our worth, **what price do you pay for this?**

Do you know who are **the people in your life that you resent the most?** Most of the time, they are the people who are getting by with what you don't like in yourself and are not able to get by with.

And, **show me a person of whom you have been feeding a grudge or a resentment for about three years**, and I will show you a resentment that will afflict your life at least 2-3 times a week ... **just because you are so good at feeding it.**

You are stuck in this cycle of ill will because you are judgmental, critical, and negative.

And **what you do anywhere, you do everywhere.**

It's eating you up. What are you going to do about it?

Once a person becomes aware of (a) how often they pursue these negative, critical, and judgmental thoughts, and (b) realize how counter-productive it is, then (c) this awareness itself can change behavior to a level.

But, let me take it **one step further.** WHEN a person **spends time in quiet prayer, NOT asking for something, BUT merely focusing on God's Presence and that God is FOR them – unconditionally** – THEN, over time, **that person's way of looking at life changes.**

**I ended up doing a little experiment, unintentionally.**

I had begun such an awareness and prayer pattern, and had been at it for some weeks. One day, I went out of town and met with someone -- NOT FROM THIS CHURCH, SO PLEASE DON'T TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHO – someone of whom I do not have a real high regard; someone of whom I normally am quite critical.

When I came back home, Jane (who has heard my characterizations of this person after each encounter) asked me how he was on this occasion. Before I could answer, I had to confess that I didn't know quite how to do so.

What I told her was, "Well, I don't know if he were a lot kinder today and a lot less obnoxious, or if my new way of looking at people made me believe this to be the case."

In either event, I came to a startling conclusion: When my value is based on living a life of comparison, competition, and contrast – instead of heart felt knowledge that God is FOR me, and that my value comes from within, from God – then my opinions of people on a daily basis are going to be judgmental, critical and negative. I will not live at peace within, OR WITHOUT. And when this is not the case, it does indeed seem like the other person's behavior is better.

I'll let you **do your own experiment**. But I believe you will find that when you get below just your head, all the way to your heart, in knowing that God is FOR you – unconditionally – then you are going to find that PEACE is going to follow you, and go before you.

As I ended last Sunday, I pray that we each take the time to be **STILL** – just 15 minutes each day – drinking in silently that very life changing **REALITY** – which comes only through an **DEEP DOWN ACCEPTANCE** of the *Reverence already humming within you: EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US and FOR US*. So may it BE. So MAY it be.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**