

This is the fourth Sunday in our Advent PREPOSITIONS series. The **first 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....**”* Like radio waves, always present but not always evident, we need to have the right receiver to realize this blessing. What a **HOPE** to sustain us.

The **second week**, we moved to the fantastic assurance that God is **FOR** us, even though a lot of preaching and teaching has mistakenly (even if for good intentions) taught folks that they must do something in order to get God's to be for us: **“have the right belief or faith statement,”** or **“be washed in the blood,”** or **“do enough good works,”** or – as one Christian told me very recently the belief he had come to in his life: **“I hope when I die, I've done enough good works to overcome my karma.”**

No! No! No! No! **NONE OF THOSE THINGS ARE NECESSARY TO MAKE GOD FOR US!** God loves us; nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing. Period. God is **FOR** us.

What **PEACE** that can bring us, to know that our worth comes from within, and is not based on anyone else's opinion. Knowing this actually empowers us to move beyond the negative, judgmental, critical thinking that plagues most Americans every three minutes of their thought; and empowers us to replace that default response with looking for the good in others.

Finally, last week we looked at how God is also **ALWAYS AHEAD OF US**, in Jesus. Emmanuel – **JOY** – God is **AHEAD** of us.

Today's preposition – **IN** -- builds upon last week's teaching. At one point in time, God taught humans the concept of **HOLINESS**. And so we learned about **HOLY** by seeing it as someplace special. Special places were built and called **Temples**, where

we could worship God.

Then after that lesson had been learned, **Jesus came along to move us AHEAD** in our thinking, so we **no longer divided the world into two types of places: HOLY and ORDINARY**. (Remember from last week, when God moves AHEAD., the direction is always in the way of breaking down dividers and including more and more.)

After Jesus' first sermon was that *"the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,"* and His teachings that *"the kingdom is within you,"* and *"you will do greater works than I do,"* Jesus' final classroom teaching of this lesson was in His crucifixion. Despite the difference in the details of their telling the story, Matthe, Mark, and Luke all agreed: when Jesus died upon the cross, *"the curtain in the temple was torn, from top to bottom."* (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45)

The symbolic division between the "holy of holies" and the worldly, the secular, the non-holy, the profane ... it was torn in two.

No longer is holiness defined by division, by separation.

**Like Jesus' first disciple – MARY, Jesus came to BE BORN IN ALL OF US.**

God came to be **WITH** us always, that we may know God is **FOR** us (*i.e.* nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus,) and to move us **AHEAD** in our understanding – ultimately to know that **GOD IS IN US**.

**You do NOT have to ATTAIN it; all you can do is to ACCEPT it.**

**At Christmas, the divine became human, so that we humans can become divine.** Holiness is meant to live in and through you, too. It is how you were made.

**You do NOT have to ATTAIN it; all you can do is to ACCEPT it. We all are virgins this Christmas, waiting for Jesus to be born in us.**

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