

Sermon 18th December 2022

Reflection on Isaiah 7: 10-16

This morning we have two parts to the sermon, this part is the serious part because we are going to poke around in the Isaiah reading. In the second part after a reflective hymn and a reading from Mathew we will have some fun with a little nativity set.

I have mentioned to you before that when we hear a lectionary text plucked out from its context, it is important to also read the verses around the text so that we can understand the background. This is crucial for today's text because basically all the lectionary focuses on is verse 14b: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Sometimes it also helps to understand the historical context, so let me fill you in on what is going on behind today's text. Ahaz is one of 40 or so kings who ruled God's people through the Kingdom years, and like most of them he was a pretty lousy one, actually he was horrendous. In Chronicles and 2 Kings we are told that Ahaz was infatuated with pagan gods and even went so far as sacrificing his own son to a false god. Ahaz even decided to rearrange the Temple by placing a graven image of his favourite pagan god front and centre. The altar of the Lord was moved off to the side, so that he could inquire of it when it suited him. There is a warning for us here, do we sometimes put God off to the side?

Ahaz, following a long line of lousy, faithless kings has put his kingdom, Judah, in great peril, there are enemies all around and in today's reading Isaiah is trying to convince Ahaz to trust in God for deliverance. Ahaz takes a lot of convincing; he even rejects the offer of a divine sign.

Now if you didn't know a bit about Ahaz' character you could assume that his "I will not test God", is all about being pious and reverent, but it is actually B.S. What Ahaz is really doing is avoiding the truth, God's Truth, capital T. Ahaz has already made up his mind to seek protection from the King of Assyria and as far as he is concerned God can stay out of the way, thank you very much! God in the corner!

But God does not give up on Ahaz and Isaiah delivers a message about a God given sign anyway. This message is pounced upon the author of Matthew to proclaim the birth of the Messiah as 'God with us' but in its context Isaiah's

prophetic announcement simply declares that by the time a child is eating toddler food, the curds and honey, which I guess is an ancient version of porridge, the enemies of Judah will have faded away. Words, numbers, visions and signs are incredibly important throughout the texts we have inherited from God's people, the Israelites and so are names. The truth, of this text, the truth with a capital T is in the name Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'. During the next hymn, which is for reflection, consider the difference it make to our lives to know that God is with us? So please remain seated and enjoy O come o come Emmanuel sung by Enya. This haunting carol was traditionally a chant sung by medieval monks and this particular version pays tribute to the carols origins, sung in English then Latin.

Song for Reflection: O come O come Emmanuel by Enya

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01BcaggibDw&ab_channel=enyatv