

Week Two Waiting with Hope

2A Isaiah: God is with Us

Pray

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you. (Psalm 33:22)

Last week we read God's promises to Abraham that he would bless the whole world through one of Abraham's descendants. Throughout the Old Testament, God continued to speak his promises, often to prophets—people he chose to proclaim his message. One of these prophets was Isaiah, a well-educated Jewish man who may have been related to the royal family. He lived in Jerusalem and often met with the king and other leaders. Isaiah's wife was a prophetess, and they had at least two sons. Isaiah's ministry began about 740 B.C., and he shared God's message for almost sixty years before he was put to death by a wicked king.

God gave Isaiah many warnings to share with the Kingdom of Judah. (The nation of Israel had split into two countries about 200 years earlier, and Judah was the southern nation.) The people of Judah were still following the rituals of worshiping God in the temple regularly, but they were also involved in deeply disturbing idolatry. Child sacrifices and temple prostitutes were common. The people were also neglecting the poor and the suffering.

Isaiah's prophecies foretold God's judgment, but the message didn't end there. God promised that the nation would be restored, the Messiah would come—once as a suffering savior but eventually as a conquering king. Even during the times of judgment, Isaiah found hope in God.

I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.
(Isaiah 8:17-18)

- Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

This passage shows us God's forgiveness and Isaiah's faith. Isaiah believed that his sin was forgiven through a sacrifice, and he immediately wanted to serve God. He moved from "woe is me" to "send me."

- Read Isaiah 30:12-18.

Here is a sample of the prophecies of coming judgment that God told Isaiah to share. I found it to be particularly vivid in the New Living Translation.

God gave Isaiah one of the most precious descriptions of Jesus: Immanuel.

*...the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel
(which means 'God is with us'). (Isaiah 7:14 NLT)*

Look for phrases in the following verses that remind you of the Lord's nearness and presence with you.

*Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you. ((Isaiah 43:2)
Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40:9-11)*

Can you think of any other verses that tell you the Lord is with you?

Pray

Choose one of the verses above, and use it in your prayer today.

2B

Mrs. Isaiah: God speaks to us

Pray

*Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope.
(Psalm 119:49)*

*What was it like,
The life of the wife of the Prophet,
Mrs. Isaiah, neb 'iah?
Were there morning coffee groups
Especially for stay-at-home-prophetess-moms
Calling to their offspring as they played?
"A-Remnant-Shall-Return,
I told you to share those apricots!
Swift-To-The-Plunder; Quick-To-Carry-Away,
Do stop tattling on your brother!
When your father gets home..."
Visions to share,
Messages to pass along,
Commiserating over that nasty burn,
"Right on his lips!
'Angelic coal,' he says.
'Let the coffee cool next time'
Is more like it!"
Or was the reality more solitary,
Singular in her calling
To share the burden of the Word,
Equal partner, yet nameless
In the shade of a known name
Mother of oddly-named sons
Mentioned only by her ministry,
Forgotten in history
No like-minded friends to natter,
Chatter with at the well, perhaps
But one precious to God,
From Whom salvation comes,
One with whom, like so many,
Aware or unaware,
God spoke.*

—Mark J. Leamy

Isaiah's wife was a prophetess. In Isaiah 8, she is described as "neb'iah," which means "prophetess." Neb'iah does not mean "married to a prophet" –it means that this woman received messages from God. (Other Old Testament women who held this title include Deborah and Miriam.) Although we know the unique names of her sons (Isaiah 8), we do not know her given name.

There is no record of the prophetic words God gave to Mrs. Isaiah. Was her message so near to Isaiah's that there was no need to record it? Or were her messages simply personal to her listeners—maybe even messages for Isaiah himself? How did she feel about her children's strange names? What did she think when Isaiah came home with burned lips and a desire to share God's messages of doom? Mark's poem captures some of these ponderings, as well as a reminder that none of us are alone.

Whether we are aware or unaware, God is speaking to each of us. Of course we don't all see visions of doom (thank you, Lord!) or hear audible voices from the sky. But Immanuel is with us.

I was struck by the fact that we don't have her words--we just know that she shared God's words. What a wonderful testimony of her life. Here are a few words from Isaiah about God's word.

Listen, and hear my voice; Pay attention, and hear my speech. (Isaiah 28:23)

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,

and do not return there until they have watered the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty,

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,

and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:8-11)

As you think about the topic of hope this week, think of the word hope as interchangeable with the word "certainty." What are you certain of right now? Look back at the above Scriptures for an answer.

Pray

...In quietness and in trust shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)

2C

St. Nicholas: the Hands of Immanuel

Pray

*Oh, the joys of those who are kind to the poor!
The Lord rescues them when they are in trouble. (Psalm 41:1 NLT)*

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
— St. Teresa of Ávila*

Many European countries celebrate St. Nicholas Day on December 5 or 6. When our kids were little, we chose to keep Christmas Day for family time and the Christmas story. But we also wanted the kids to know about St. Nicholas. So every year, following European traditions, the kids put their shoes by the patio door at night on December 5. In the morning, the shoes would be full of candy or small gifts. Sometimes the shoes were replaced by brand new slippers. (Why am I writing in the past tense? We still do this, and our oldest is 20. And I need new slippers!)

We had a beautiful children's book about St. Nicholas.¹ The book explained that Nicholas was a Bishop in what is now the country of Turkey. He was a kind and generous man. In one example of his generosity, he heard about a poor family whose three daughters had no money for dowries. With no support and no hope of marriage, the girls were probably destined for slavery. Nicholas went for a walk that evening and tossed several gold coins into the window of the impoverished family. The girls' shoes were airing out near the window, and the coins fell into the shoes. This book was especially popular with my Lydia, Annika, and Tina, because the daughters in the story are Lydia, Anna, and Katrina.

In the centuries since Nicholas died in 343, the Christian church has honored him and adopted him as a symbol of giving. Nicholas shows us an excellent example of how Christians can be the hands and feet of Jesus. Sometimes we experience the nearness of God, "God With Us," because God reaches out through human hands.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

A Prayer for St. Nicholas Day

Grant, Almighty God, that your church may be so inspired by the example of your servant Nicholas of Myra, that it may never cease to work for the welfare of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer, 1979

Pray

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
(Psalm 130:5)*

1. St. Nicholas: The Real Story of the Christmas Legend, by Julie Stiegemeyer
https://www.amazon.com/Saint-Nicholas-Story-Christmas-Legend/dp/0758613415/ref=sr_1_4?crid=1ABKELORQTME5&keywords=st+nicholas+book&qid=1638397815&srefix=st+nicholas%2Caps%2C269&sr=8-4