

Advent 4A – God is with You

1. In the 7th chapter of his book Isaiah gives one of the most well-known and important messianic prophecies of the OT
 - a. In context he's addressing a very common problems in many of us – pride.
 - i. In this case pride in our ability to handle our problems on our own
 - ii. We don't like to rely on the help of others, even God
 - iii. Dependence is perceived as weakness and we don't want to be weak
 - iv. But when we do have problems, we feel isolated and alone precisely because we're unwilling to ask for help - it's a vicious cycle!
 - b. What we learn from Isaiah is that as God's children He is always with us
 - i. Not only that but He wants us to bring our problems to Him, to rely on Him not only for support but for solutions, too
 - ii. This Advent season when so much is happening in our world to shake our faith we're reminded that you are NOT alone, **God IS with You!**
2. In order to understand what was happening in our OT lesson we'll need to delve into a little bit of Israel's history
 - a. At this time Israel was divided in two: Northern Israel and Southern Judah
 - i. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was in a defensive alliance with Syria against the larger, aggressive Assyrian Empire
 - ii. It appears that they were trying to force the Kingdom of Judah to join
 - b. Ahaz, the king of the southern kingdom, was no friend of God
 - i. The 16th chapter of 2Ki tells us when he came to power, **"Ahaz...did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel."** (2 Ki 16:2-3) – he was evil, an idolater, and even sacrificed his children to them in the fire.
 - ii. So, when Isaiah says to Ahaz, **"Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.**" (Is 7:2) – he didn't know where to turn for help
 - iii. How was Ahaz going to save his kingdom from invasion? He didn't think about turning to God rather he looked to himself and human strength.
 - iv. 2 Ki 16 reports that in response to this threat, **"So Ahaz sent messengers to [the] king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."** (2Ki 16:7)
 - c. God sends Isaiah to deliver one of the most comforting prophecies of all about the coming Messiah.
 - i. Put yourself in the place of Ahaz, when you've faced seemingly overwhelming problems and how you resolved them
 - ii. Granted none of us is a king with millions of people depending on us
 - iii. Yet we still face challenges that defy a quick, easy solution and produce the same kind of anxiety that makes our hearts "shake" like Ahaz's

- iv. The promise that Isaiah is about to give is no less true for you than it was for believers back then, it reminds us that **God is with us!**
- 3. So, as we open our verses Isaiah has been sent to Ahaz with a word from the Lord
 - a. **"Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."** (Is 7:10-11)
 - i. God had promised to protect Judah from whom the Messiah would come.
 - ii. God knows our weakness...He knows that we often want confirmation of a promise that we can see and touch...and that's what He offered Ahaz
 - b. But Ahaz had a proud, sinner's heart and he cloaked it behind a veil of piety
 - i. He said, **"I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."** (Is 7:12)
 - ii. Had Ahaz, the idolater suddenly become conscious of violating God's decrees quoting Deut. 6 to Him, **"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah."**? – Not by a long shot!
 - iii. Ahaz was busy solving His own problems, he was negotiating with Assyria for their support as we heard a moment ago.
 - c. But God was calling Israel to remember that they weren't supposed to trust in human efforts, God was their strength...their army.
 - i. Listen to what He promised in Deut 20, **"When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you..."** (Deut 20:1)
 - ii. Thus, God rebukes Ahaz, **"Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?"** (Is 7:13)
 - iii. Isaiah says, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."** (Is 7:14) or as Matthew tells us "God with us," a reminder of that promise.
 - d. God was with them through their immediate trouble and in less time than it takes for a child to know right from wrong He would deliver them
 - i. But also, there would be One coming in the future who was "God with us" God in flesh to reassure us that God fights for us to deliver us.
 - ii. Ahaz demonstrated the all-too-human tendency to seek our own solution to a problem and forget the Word of God
 - iii. God was with Israel even if they didn't believe it.
- 4. Too often we do the same thing despite God's clear promise to be with us
 - a. The fulfillment of that promise was given when our Lord was born in Bethlehem demonstrating that God was indeed with us – our Gospel lesson
 - i. Willingly subjecting Himself to the same temptations and weaknesses that we are, yet without sin
 - ii. Our conquering King came wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger to deliver us from our invincible enemy (not the armies King Ahaz worried about) but Satan and death.

- iii. To demonstrate once and for all that He wasn't a distant God, but so connected with His creation that He was willing to die to save it
- b. And if He would go so far to secure our salvation He IS certainly is capable of handling our everyday and not so every day problems.
 - i. Heb 4 says, **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** (4:16)
 - ii. So often we imagine that God wouldn't be interested in helping us, but nothing could be further from the truth!
 - iii. God not only is with us in Word and Sacrament but interested in the details of your life, in Jn 16 we hear, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."** (Jn 16:23)
 - iv. Immanuel, God is with us is also God is with you!
- c. That message isn't just for you, He has made that promise for all people
 - i. During this busy time of year when the pressures of life can overtake us remember that promise for yourself.
 - ii. And even more be willing to share that message with someone you know who might be struggling, who might be feeling alone, for whom the holidays are anything but jolly.
 - iii. At the end of Matthew He promised, **"I am with you always even to the end of the age,"** (Mt 28:20)
 - iv. God is with you trust Him to help you when everything looks helpless!