

Sunday, July 28, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “A Son Given to Us”

After the past few weeks of Isaiah’s dire warnings, I thought we deserved some time in the beautiful, promising part of the prophet’s writing.

I read through chapters 7 and 8, descriptions of the Assyrian invasion, the exile and the overwhelming gloom that beset the people of Judah.

When I got to chapter 9 and read the familiar words- “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us,” I felt the joy of Christ’s promise.

I thought, “Oh yes, let’s explore this passage on Sunday.”

As I read through the various commentaries on the ninth chapter of Isaiah, I was surprised and somewhat disappointed to realize that this beautiful poem is only read at Christmas.

In just seven verses the promise of a savior is delivered.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—the one who brings us light.

We ought to visit this passage every day, reminding ourselves that God incarnate, Jesus Christ, came into our lives and walked among us taking upon himself the sins of all humanity.

The Prince of Peace promises to deliver a peace that will be eternal – not just a temporary cessation of hostilities among nations, but an end of the root causes of war – human sin.

I met a Korean minister this summer who was explaining to me his efforts to work toward peace between North and South Korea.

He said to me, “The problem in Korea is that we never reached a peace agreement.

We had a cease fire agreement that is still in effect, but we do not have peace.

Each day soldiers from North and South Korea stand with guns pointed at one another – they do not shoot – but they do not have peace.”

For human sin to be removed there must be a state of peace between God and humanity.

Not only must humanity be at peace with God, but, what is more important, God must be at peace with us.

When the peace of God is in the human heart, only then there will there be world peace.

True peace comes to us because a child was born.

Commentator Edward Young described: “When the prophet wrote, the people had not yet seen this light, but its occurrence was so certain and vivid to Isaiah’s mind that he described it as though it had already dawned.

In place of the darkness of calamity the people saw the light of peace and blessedness;

in place of the darkness of death, the light of life;

in place of the darkness of sin, the light of salvation.

Salvation in its widest sense had shined upon these people, a complete reversal of their condition had occurred.

Only a Light which was able to bring life and immortality to light could dispel this deep darkness, and such a light appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.”

This promise is timeless. It is God’s promise for eternity – not just for Isaiah’s community, but for all of God’s people.

It was to the Book of Isaiah that the early church turned to understand who they were and what their role was as witnesses to the Christ event.

Isaiah was apparently the most helpful single book of the Old Testament in assisting the early church to understand the sufferings and crucifixion of the Christ.

Isaiah’s prophecy provided help in understanding nearly every phase of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection.

The early Christians searched Scripture to try to understand why Christ suffered the fate of a common criminal, why he was so poorly treated, why he was crucified.

They found help in the prophets, especially in Isaiah, to understand how God could turn tragedy into triumph.

Just as the old Israel and Judah had died in the assaults upon them by Assyria and Babylonia but were resurrected as the new Israel, so God was effecting through the crucified and resurrected Christ a new Israel, the church.

Early Christian readings of Scripture shaped the thinking of the church about what God had done in Christ and was doing with them—and it shaped the writing they did when they wanted to share that thinking.

The gospel writers searched the Scriptures and found a way to understand what God was doing.

To understand what God was doing in Christ one had to know Scripture.

Isaiah's promise of the gift of a son, the prince of peace, the wonderful counselor, gave Jesus' followers a context for understanding the incarnation of Christ.

It gave them hope for a future.

For us to understand what God is doing in our lives, we must also know the scriptures.

We visit the scriptures to learn what God has done and what God might do in our lives.

John van de Laar writes "The incarnation of Christ calls us to be active participants in bringing Christ's message to the world.

In our communities, including church we can embody the just ways of Christ, opting out of the power struggles and "worldly" use of faith/religion for political or material gains.

We can embrace the hidden, agenda-less, self-giving life of Christ.

If we will renew our commitment to incarnation, we will seek and find the places that most need us to serve, heal, and reconcile while also confronting abuses of power, wealth or faith.

If we are willing to listen to the message of compassion, inclusivity and justice that God has spoken through Christ, and if we are willing to embody that message in our own lives, families and communities, we will know the true light of Christ coming into the world, and we will know ourselves as those who have received Christ, who believe in his name, and who are rightly called children of God."

Agreeing to embody the incarnation can seem a bit daunting.

Henri Nouwen suggested "The imitation of Christ does not mean to live a life like Christ, but to live your life as authentically as Christ lived his, then there are many ways and forms in which a person can be a Christian.

Our Bible tells the story of God's relationship with humanity.

Scripture recounts the many ways that human beings have attempted to live out the calling to follow God.

I would venture to say that there is no circumstance that you might face, no emotion that you might feel, no situation that you may encounter, that is not shared by some biblical ancestor.

The psalms alone are a comprehensive litany of human successes and failures – covering everything from the coronation of a king to the planting of a tree.

For me, the first biblical passage that I recall being deeply moved and inspired by was Micah 6:8

Oh mortal, what does the Lord require of you; but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

I'm not even sure where I first heard that verse, but it opened my eyes and heart to scripture.

That verse, combined with Jesus' great commandment to love God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind, provide the foundation for my theology.

I continue to be amazed at the insights that I discover whenever I spend time with the Bible.

One of our UCC slogans says that "God is Still Speaking."

I believe that this is true. Though the Biblical Canon was closed 400 years ago, we still have the opportunity to explore scripture to discern what it is saying to us today.

I invite you to put "The Book" on your summer reading list and see what God might be saying to you this day.

My question for you today is

1. In what scripture passages have you found hope or comfort?
2. What does God is still speaking mean to you?
3. What are some of the ways that we can live the incarnation in our lives today?