

Written Copy: A Promise Only God Could Keep-Isaiah 7:10

4th Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 22nd, 2019

Text: Isaiah 7:14 and Romans 1:2-4

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Exegetical Statement

Isaiah is called by God to go meet King Ahaz as he is checking the water supply for the city in preparation for the coming attack by the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Syria's combined forces. Ahaz and the rest of the city are living in fear of this attack since their armies have been solidly defeated by them. The LORD through His prophet promises that although both kings seem to like a coming fire, they will be no more than smoldering stumps since the LORD will protect His city and His people. Only Ahaz and the people must remain firm in their faith. King Ahaz doesn't respond to this so the LORD is willing to give him a sign that they will be protected from these oncoming armies. The LORD offers to give whatever sign Ahaz would like to ask for. Ahaz answers in what at first may appear to be a pious answer of faith that "I will not ask and I will not test the LORD. But this is actually the response of unbelief in the LORD and His ability to provide a sign. Isaiah responds that King Ahaz is not only trying the patience of his people but is now trying the patience of the LORD. But the LORD will give a sign nonetheless and it will be that young women, who no one expects to be pregnant, will give birth to a son. She will name the boy Immanuel. He will eat the food of the poor. But before he is old enough to reach the age of accountability the two kings Ahaz fears and their kingdoms will be made desolate. But because Ahaz turned to Assyria for help and not to the LORD, the very kingdom he looked to for rescue would invade his land and strip it bare of resources and would come and lay siege to Jerusalem.

Focus Statement:

Our LORD God makes and keeps awesome promises. He promised to save faithless Ahaz and Jerusalem from destruction and provided the sign of a maiden being found with child. This sign was proof that He would keep His promise to save them. But this sign finds its fulfillment in the salvation the LORD promised to all men, the coming of the Savior who, born of a virgin who had known no man, would fully be Immanuel-God with us. He would give His life on the cross to save all men from the eternal death their sins deserved. He promises to return and give all who believe eternal life. He is the God who can and will keep that promise

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We make promises all the time to each other. Some we shouldn't make because we can't be sure we can keep them. Other's we make with no real intention of keeping them. So when others make promises to us we can be quite skeptical about them

What the hearer should do as a result:

Put our faith not in leaders, or ourselves, or anyone else. Instead let our faith rest in He who came, died, and rose again as promised and will come again

Subject Sentence: Count on God to Keep All His Promises

One of the things I promised myself when I left behind the wonderful world of grocery store retail was that I would not set my foot inside a store the weekend just before Christmas. So where did I find myself yesterday evening? At Meijer's, along with the rest of humanity. Actually it wasn't as bad as I thought. It took me a little over an hour, the normal shopping trip time. And there were only two items on my list that they were out of stock on. But that means I will be breaking another promise I made to myself and heading back to shop two days before Christmas.

How about you? What promises have you broken so far this holiday season? Promises like: to not wait until the last minute to finish your Christmas shopping? To not overspend your budget on Christmas gifts. To not spread yourself too thin with your commitments to attend various holiday gatherings. To get your Christmas Cards out earlier. To stay true to your diet. It's OK if you've broken one or more of these promises to yourself. Coming up after Christmas we have a whole new holiday-New Years Resolutions-to make promises that we cannot keep.

How about when people don't keep their promises to us? That can hurt. If it happens enough by people close to you it becomes very hard to trust that anyone will keep their promises. And then there are those promises that people make that are so outrageous we know they could never follow through on them, nor would they. When I worked the Lottery Machine at Hillers there was a customer who knew I was considering going to the Seminary. He told me "When I win the lottery, I'll buy you your own Church!" Well, I didn't cancel my plans to head to Seminary over that promise. Even if he ever did win the biggest jackpot in history, he had made so many similar promises to employees he could never fulfill them all.

King Ahaz in our Old Testament Lesson had issues believing that promises could be fulfilled. The LORD God through the prophet Isaiah offered to fulfill whatever promise the King asked of Him as a sign that He would save Jerusalem. And the King refused.

It's not that King Ahaz didn't need someone to come save his city. Two superior armies had joined forces against the Southern Kingdom of Judah and were marching to take over the city and the kingdom. One of those armies, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, had recently soundly defeated King Ahaz: killing 120,000 of his soldiers and had taking captive 200,000 more. With the Syrian Army joining forces he knew he didn't stand a chance. These two kingdoms wanted to take control of Judah and make them join their fight against the up and coming empire of Assyria which was threatening to take over all of Palestine. Ahaz wanted no part of fighting against Assyria. In fact, he had decided to trust Assyria to protect he and his city and had sent envoys along with many valuables to try to buy their help.

All of Israel was worried about the coming invasion. King Ahaz is checking the city's fresh water supply ahead of the siege when the LORD sends His prophet Isaiah out to meet him. Isaiah tells the king not to be worried about Syria or Israel. He says that their armies may look like an all-consuming fire, but in the hands of the LORD God they are nothing more than smoldering stumps, dying embers. Isaiah tells Ahaz that if he turns to the LORD God and puts his faith in Him then he and his people will be saved. But Ahaz doesn't respond to these encouraging words. So the LORD through Isaiah tells King Ahaz to ask for a promise to be fulfilled, to make it one that is as high as the highest heavens or as deep as the underworld. In other words ask for something supernatural to happen. Something that only the LORD God, the Creator of all things could do. Something that would prove to King Ahaz that the LORD's promise of protection would be fulfilled.

Now stop and think about this for a minute. The LORD is giving King Ahaz and Jerusalem a blank check and saying “Go ahead and fill in whatever amount you like. In other words nothing is too great for you to ask the LORD to do. And what would that include? Anything and everything! The whole world, the whole universe is the LORD’s He created it and sustains it. He created the Natural Laws of the universe but is not bound by them. He can work outside of them as He wishes to accomplish His will. Now what would you ask the LORD God to do as the sign? How about destroy the two armies coming against you? How about making your army stronger than Israel, Syria and Assyria combined? Or make the walls and defenses of the city so strong that no one could ever break them down. What seemingly impossible thing might you ask? To make your wildest dreams come true? To cure cancer? To bring your loved one back from death to life? The LORD wanted the test to be the impossible, so that when He fulfilled it all might know that He alone is the LORD who saves.

And how does King Ahaz respond to this incredible invitation? With what sounds on the surface to be a very pious sounding statement: **Isaiah 7:12 “But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.”** Now it would be one thing if King Ahaz reason for saying this was because of the strength of His faith in the LORD, saying “I don’t need a sign because my faith and trust is in Him”. But the reason is quite the opposite. He had no faith in the LORD. He had put his faith and trust in the Canaanite God Baal, so much so that he closed up the temple and set up altars to Baal on every street corner. He was even willing to sacrifice his own children to this false god. He put his trust in the Kingdom of Assyria who had designs on conquering the whole region of Palestine and didn’t need Judah’s help or alliance to do it. In other words King Ahaz had put his trust in all the wrong

places. And lacking faith he could not and would not put His trust in the only One who could save Him. The LORD was offering Ahaz a chance to believe, was offering Grace to him, and Ahaz refused it. He was wearying the LORD, trying His patience.

The LORD would have every reason to let those two armies come in and have their way with Jerusalem. Except the LORD had made a promise long ago to King David that He would raise up one of his descendants to give Him an eternal kingdom. It was part of a promise He had made to Abraham that one of His descendants would bless the entire world. It was a fulfilling of the promise made to Adam and Eve after the Fall and to all their descendants since: that He would raise up One who would crush the head of the serpent and restore mankind to righteousness before God.

So the LORD through Isaiah responded (**Isaiah 7:14**) **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”** And the LORD fulfilled this promise before the unbelieving eyes of King Ahaz. There was a young virgin girl who, up until now had not had children, a maiden that no one would’ve expected to become pregnant, yet she did. It was a supernatural event that only could have been done by the hand of God. So she named the child Immanuel-“God is with us” because his birth was a sign that the LORD God had not forsaken His wandering sinful people but was going to have mercy on them. As Isaiah went on to prophesy before this boy reached the age of accountability the two Kingdoms Jerusalem feared: Israel and Syria, would become deserted. Their land would be left desolate by the invasion of Assyrian army who would kill the people, and those not killed would be taken away as captives. But because King Ahaz refused the LORD’s request and refused to believe there would be a

price for he and his city to pay. Assyria would invade them next, stripping their land bare, and laying siege to Jerusalem.

This sign was fulfilled for the people in King Ahaz's day to see and know the LORD God keeps His promises. But it had a greater fulfillment to come. It would be part of the salvation that the LORD has promised for all people. And it found its complete fulfillment when a virgin named Mary found herself pregnant with child whose father was a man, but by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. A supernatural event that only the LORD God could accomplish. This child would be more than just a sign that God was still with His people to lead and guide them. This child would actually be God taking on human flesh and becoming man, while still remaining fully God. The LORD God Almighty who is infinite in His power, being, and majesty came down and intimately joined Himself with His creation. His fallen creation. Came to live among us, a sordid and sorry group of sinful men and women who break promises to each other and to our Heavenly Father every day. The giver of all life came down to live with the creatures He had given life to and they refused to recognize Him.

But He came to give to them an even greater sign than the virgin birth. He came to be the greatest sign of all. He came to do what only God could do: take upon Himself the sins of the whole world. He came to suffer and die for them and in doing so to free all men from their worst and most evil enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Only God in human flesh could suffer sufficiently to forgive all the worlds sins. And He did so for you. Now that's a promise that is hard to believe. But He provided a supernatural sign to end all signs. He promised that He would come back to life on Easter Morning. And that's exactly what He did. He did that for

you, so that you might know that with sins forgiven you too will rise from the grave, never to die again. That is the sign He gives to you and to me through His Gospel.

He knows that this supernatural event is not something you can believe on your own. So He gives to you and to me another supernatural sign, something that only God can do. He takes every day normal tap water and makes the application of it a life changing event. He promises us that when we baptize someone in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit He is there, present yet unseen. Invisible but with the power to do something supernatural: to change your heart and mind from unbelief to belief. To give you the miracle of faith so that you can know and hold fast to all the promises He gives to you in His Gospel Message. So that you can know and hold fast to the fact that not only will these things happen, but they have happened and are happening to you. Your lives as believers in Christ here today are proof positive that Baptism works. By that miracle of faith given you can confess your sins to Him knowing that He is the gracious and merciful God He shows Himself to be in Jesus. Even as we continue to sin daily we can hold fast to the ongoing cleansing power of our Baptism as we confess our sins and believe the words of the Absolution.

Not only do we have His promise of eternal life to come, but He promises to be with us leading and guiding us through the problems of this fallen world. Now that promise can be hard for us to hold on to. Especially when those who we love most in our lives fail to keep promises. When we pray and ask God to help us through a difficult time and it seems that His help is not coming. When we ask Him to heal us or a loved one and the healing is not coming. It can seem like He fails to keep His promises just like other people do.

But when we doubt His love, His care, His presence, we are to turn to the place where He promises His real presence can be found: His Word and Sacrament. It is here He recharges and renews that supernatural power that is faith by which we can trust He is the LORD that can do anything. Just as He told childless Abraham and Sarah in **Genesis 18:14** **"Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."** Just as Jeremiah the prophet gave witness to **(Jeremiah 32:17)** **"Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."** Just as the angel told the virgin Mary in **Luke 1:35-37** **"³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy---the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."** And Just as Jesus Himself tells us in **Luke 18:26-27** **"²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."**

Through His Word He says to you and to me. Even when the things we pray about and the answers we need look impossible. By faith we hold fast to His promise and the witness of Scripture that nothing is impossible with God.

We will continue to make promises that we can't or won't keep. Other people will make promises to us that they can't or won't keep. Times will come in our life that it seems as if God is unable or unwilling to keep His promises to us. But we hold fast by faith to His promise that His death and resurrection was for you. That your Baptism has and continues to wash away all your sins so that you remain right with God. That He is with you now and

has your best interest in mind and in His hands. Not necessarily that all your prayers are answered the way you'd like them to be. But that He is keeping close by His side throughout your journey in this fallen world so that nothing may come between and separate you from His love. That's a promise to hold fast to; now and forever. Amen.