

A Thrill of Hope in a Weary World

Week Four: A Future with Hope

Read Isaiah 7:10-16

"Ask a sign of the Lord your God..."

What an opportunity the prophet lays at the feet of King Ahaz in this week's reading. Ask God for a sign, any sign, no matter how great or small. Ask God to make the stars spell out your name in every known language. Ask God to make the grass grow bright pink for a day. Name the sign and the Lord your God has promised to make it happen.

How much we yearn for signs from God: Is this the person I should marry? Is this the job that will help me best use the gifts God has given me? Is it time to leave my call? Which opportunity should I take, and which one should I pass up? Just a little sign, God, a tiny arrow pointing in one direction or another would be great. When the way ahead is unclear and filled with unknowns, even a small nod that we are heading in a good direction, much less the right direction, would be welcomed.



And so when King Ahaz responds with a very pious, "Nah, I'm good" we think, "Um, I'll take that sign if he doesn't want it..."

Of course, our circumstances are quite different than those of King Ahaz. His kingdom, the place that as the leader he was called to protect, was being threatened by an advancing army. And not just any advancing army, but that of the Assyrians, who were razing every village, town, and city in their path. They were on their way. The future looked bleak. **As pious as Ahaz's answer was, "I don't want to trouble the Lord," there may also have been some fear in it too.** "I don't want to know. I don't think anyone, even the Lord my God, can save us from this fate."

Sometimes, we do find hope in the unknown. For that brief moment before the diagnosis is revealed, or the offer comes or doesn't, or the intended betrothed says their "yes" or "no," we can pretend that all is well. And yet, such hope is fleeting and cannot last.

(Devotion continues on next page)



South-Central Synod of Wisconsin



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Which is why Isaiah seems to heave a big sigh, “My king, I find you annoying and now I see you intend to annoy God too” and then to point Ahaz to the sign the Lord wished to give. Here’s your sign, a young woman with child, whose name will be Immanuel which, Ahaz, you might note, means, “God-with-us.”

Your sign is a young child whose name and presence stand as a reminder that the Lord your God is with you, whether the Assyrians smash your kingdom to bits or head for the hills. You can’t piously refuse that sign, it simply is, and it simply is for you and for your people. **Immanuel, God-with-us, is here and is here to stay.**

There can be, at times, hope in the not-knowing. But there is also hope in the finding out. The treatment plan, or the plan to move toward a grace-filled death through hospice. The excitement of a new role or the renewed commitment to the place you are called. **And the hope doesn’t come from the plans, but from the trust and knowledge that as people of faith we already know how the story ends.** We already know that Christ, our Immanuel, is born, lives, loves, teaches, dies, and rises again, defeating death and despair for all time.

We also know that there are a lot of blank pages in between that promised future and the lives we are living right now. And so as we wait, we watch for signs of the hope proclaimed by Isaiah and the other prophets of old. We watch for the hope of which Mary sang, the hope that Jesus proclaimed, the hope that has sustained Christ’s followers through the ages. We watch, we wait for Immanuel, trusting that the signs of that holy child’s presence are all around us – in water, in Word, in bread and wine, in the community of faith God has called together.

As we move into these final days before the celebration of Christ’s birth, may you both sense and be a sign of hope.

Signs of Hope in the SCSW

Ministry for and with the Marginalized in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

This week we lift up the ways the SCSW is walking with those who are often pushed to the margins by those with power and privilege. We are grateful to share that 24 congregations in our synod have gone through the process to become Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregations, meaning they are intentionally welcoming of our LGBTQIA+ siblings and are actively engaged in anti-racism work as well. Our Racial Equity Team has sponsored listening sessions with the Latinx community. These sessions are designed to show support and solidarity and to learn how we can best accompany our migrant neighbors in this challenging and dangerous time. Parroquia San Jose and Parroquia Santa Maria are two Latinx ministries in our synod, offering a space for worship, fellowship, and outreach for our Latinx siblings. In addition, many rostered ministers in our synod work with local coalitions to provide resources and support for immigrants and refugees. For safety reasons, such work is not always publicized, but we give thanks to God for the ways God’s people in our synod are standing with and walking alongside the most vulnerable in our communities.