

## Light for our Darkness: Love

### Isaiah 7:10-15

This is a beloved text, a familiar text, a text that I'm pretty sure that even as I began to read it, everyone was already saying the next lines: "Look, the young woman is with child. She shall bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel." This is a great piece of Scripture that gives us hope, that gives us peace. It brings us joy. It shows us the love of God for us as God's children. This is a beloved text full of promise, full of grace, full of joy, a text that reminds us of the very working of God in our midst. We as people of faith love to read this text, especially at this time of year, because we know the rest of the story.

this is not the first time that we have heard this text and it certainly will not be the last time we as people of faith encounter this text. So why was it that this time when I was reading it through, preparing for this sermon, I was struck by a very ordinary word in this text, an ordinary word that because of its placement in the sentence, opened my eyes and helped me experience the Kingdom of God in a new and life-transforming way. As I was reading this text, I struck by the word "the" in verse 14, THE, three simple letters that tell of a huge gift for the people of God.

THE: It is a very ordinary word, a word that we take for granted each and every day, a word that we assume holds no real meaning for us. We casually slip it into sentences. We overlook it as we read lines in our book. We assume it is put there to guide us on to the next word, to help us move on to other more exciting words in our text. It is probably the most common, the most ordinary word in our English language. And it is certainly not the word I expected to ponder on all week, especially when there are a lot more words with deeper meaning and more significance in this text. T H E, the, it is not a word known for its deep theological text, so why did it stand out? Why out of all the deep rich theological words found in this text, was I drawn to the word “the”? What does it add to this beautiful comforting, inspiring text?

Well, for me to answer these questions, I need to share some background on this text, that will help explain my ponderings this week. As we know, Isaiah is a prophet for the nation of Judah and in our text, he has been sent to share a word from God for King Ahaz. The problem is that Ahaz really doesn't want to hear this word from God. He was too caught up in the intense political game that surrounded him at the time. Israel and Aram, neighboring countries, had given Ahaz an ultimatum. Judah under Ahaz's leadership was either with their coalition or against them. There was no in between especially when it came down to the

Assyrian army that would soon be knocking on all their doors. So Ahaz was in a bind. Who should he trust?

And Isaiah's word to him was to trust in God, trust in the promises that God gave to his ancestors, the house of David, generations ago. Isaiah tells Ahaz to trust in the promises that God has always kept to the people of God, promises that Ahaz could rely on, promises that he could stand on, promises that would strengthen him and comfort him, especially during this time of uncertainty. Isaiah tells Ahaz to trust in God.

But this strengthening affirming comforting word from God was not really the word that Ahaz was hoping to receive. Ahaz was hoping that Isaiah was going to say to him, "Oh, it's okay. Trust the world powers. They know more than God anyway. Oh, it's okay to continue with your own plans without including God in the conversation. You know more than God any way." Ahaz was hoping that Isaiah was going to say that he had permission and God's blessings to be in charge, to do what he wanted to do, and that God would just go along for the ride, no questions asked. Ahaz was hoping that Isaiah was going to say that he was in control, not God.

But that was not exactly the word that Isaiah brought to Ahaz that day. Instead, Isaiah brought a reassurance that Ahaz had nothing to fear because God was in control, that God would have the last word, that even though it seemed

hopeless, God was there, leading them, guiding them, filling them with hope and love. Isaiah was telling Ahaz that he had nothing to fear, just trust in God. However, Ahaz still would not listen to Isaiah and was bound and determined to do things his way. So Isaiah tried to reason with Ahaz one more time, tries to get him to open his eyes to the possibilities of trusting in God, of letting go and letting God by saying, “Okay, Tell you what, ask God for any sign and God will do it. Anything at all. It could be as outrageous as Ahaz wanted it to be. Just ask God for a sign and God would do it.

But once again, this was not exactly what Ahaz was hoping to hear so he tries to deflect Isaiah’s proposal by acting all high and mighty, by faking a little piety and responded by saying, “Oh no, I can’t do that. That would be disrespectful to God.” Now if we remember anything about Ahaz’s background, we know that this is probably the first time that Ahaz was ever concerned about being disrespectful to God. Everything Ahaz did as king of Judah was disrespectful to God. He ignored the poor, ruled in favor of the rich, and let injustices fill his kingdom. He stole from the Temple to pay bribes to world powers. He encouraged the people to worship other gods and idols during his reign. He was a bad king and let’s be honest, the last thing Ahaz had ever been concerned about was being disrespectful to God and Isaiah knew it!

So in response to Ahaz's lack of faith and trust, Isaiah turns to Ahaz and says, "Fine, you don't want a sign. My God is going to give one to you anyway. And Isaiah says, "Look, the young woman is with child. She will bear a son and call him Emmanuel". Now here is where it gets interesting! In his statement, Isaiah uses the word the. It really doesn't seem like a big deal at first glance. It is just an ordinary world but when we look again, and we take into account its placement, we realize that it makes a huge difference and it really is a major theological statement about the presence of God. When Isaiah uses the word "the" to describe the young woman, he is using an article of speech to specify something definite, something sure, something certain. He is not talking about some random woman years from now who might become pregnant. He is talking about a particular woman, right then and there, who was currently pregnant. Isaiah points to a particular woman and says "God is in our midst right now". God is here with us now. The presence of God is among the people of God, right here, right now.

By using the word "the", Isaiah is letting Ahaz and us as readers know that he is not talking about some woman years from now who might become pregnant. Isaiah is letting us know that the presence of God is among the people of God right now. Emmanuel, God is with us, was happening right then, at that moment in time for the people of God. At a time when darkness threatened to overtake the people

once more, Isaiah gave them a sign, a reminder that God was with them, that God had never left them.

And that sign for the people of God, for Isaiah's community was good news! Isaiah was telling Ahaz, that he has put his trust in the wrong thing. Nations will fall. Treaties will fail. Humans have a tendency to go back on their promises but God never would. God was there. God had never left the people of God. Since the beginning of time God had been with and among the people of God. God had watched over God's creation with love and grace. God had always been with and among the people of God, guiding them, leading them, giving them hope, filling them with grace and love. Isaiah reminded the people of God that God was, is, and had always been with and among the people of God. He was reminding them that God would always be with the people of God.

That was good news for Isaiah's community and that continues to be the good news for us today. Even though we are waiting for the Messiah to come, even though it seems like our world is covered by darkness, even though we are waiting for God's Kingdom to be realized here on earth, God is already in our midst. God is already here. We can catch glimpse of the Kingdom of God already present in our lives. God is in our midst now, today, and always, filling our lives with peace and comfort. For Isaiah's community, The sign that signifies the presence of God among the people of God was woman who was already experiencing the joy of

new life. For Isaiah's community, The sign given to them to celebrate the gift of presence of God among the people of God was a young woman who is already with child, who is already experiencing the promise of hope and new beginnings, who is already experiencing the beauty of new life. Isaiah shared this sign with his community to remind them that even in their darkest hour, God had not left them alone and to remind them that God never would leave them alone. Nations may rise. Nations may fall. But God was always with them. And the sign given in this text is not just for Isaiah's community thousands of years ago. It continues to be a sign for us as well.

that is the beauty of this text and that the significance of the "the". It stands as a reminder, a sign for all time that God is already with us as the people of God. God is with us and among each every day of our lives. Even in our darkest hours, we have nothing to fear because God is with us. We can continue on our journeys, regardless of what comes our way because we know that this promise from God is not a vague promise. It is definite. It is certain. It is sure. God's promise to us does not give us false hope. It does not tells us that at some point in the future God may become concerned about us, that at some point in the future, God may take notice of us, that at some point in the future, that God may decide to be a part of our lives.

No, we as the people of God have been given a promise, have been given a sign, have been given a reminder that God is with us, that God is among us, that

God is in our midst. the presence of God is already among the people of God. the Kingdom of God is already in our midst. We have nothing to fear! God is with us each and every day of our lives, guiding us, leading us strengthening us, comforting us.

Our God is still working in this world, and our God continues to give us signs each and every day to remind us that God is with us always. Signs like the bread and the cup that we partake each time with gather as children of God, signs like the community of faith that support us and love us, signs like the cross that remind us that God loved us so much that God sent God's only Son so that we might live. Signs that are definite. Signs that we can experience in our daily lives as sure things. Signs that fill us with certainty that God is with and among the people of God.

Each and every day our lives are filled with the presence of God. Each and every day we are reminded that God is with us. Each and every day, we experience the Kingdom of God in our midst. God is with us. That is the promise. Emmanuel. The presence of God is among the people of God. God is with us, today and all days, guiding us, leading us, loving us and we know this to be true because God has given us a sign: the bread and the cup, the cross, the strength to become the people that God created us to be, the promise that the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel. So as we wait for the birth of

our Savior, may we open our eyes to the signs and promises given to us daily that  
God is with us now and always. Amen.