

“. . . swallow your pride . . .”

Isaiah 7:10-16

December 22, 2019

We started our Advent journey, considering the 18<sup>th</sup> verse of Proverbs 29: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). Through the four weeks of Advent, we have explored visions given to the prophet Isaiah, visions that still speak to us today about our past, our present, and our future.

As we have followed Isaiah's visions, we have encountered pictures of the earth as a place where the wolf, lamb, leopard, lion, calf, kid, and little child will all be able to play together in peace. We've seen a picture of an arid wilderness blossoming with vegetation. We have been told there will be a road through the desert: easy to travel on and it will be provided for all who will be coming to the house of God to learn about God.

A road that, all are invited to travel on, that is level and smooth to all who want to join the journey. One person who did not want to join the journey was King Ahaz, the reading that George shared with us this morning.

There are many stories about folks who have in the past over-extended themselves financially, maybe even some people present today. Many, many stories; but I recently read about a farm family who discussed the idea of auctioning off their family farm in the 1980's. The family members described this as one of the worst moments in their lives. They were saddled with debt and there truly was no way out. The wife and mother's words were very telling and some key phrases stood out to me, when I read the interview. She stated that the family began to realize that their problems were "larger than us" and they were "forced to swallow their pride". They had to talk about their difficult situation and get help.

I really wish that King Ahaz could have admitted his need, but he didn't. He hung onto his stubborn pride until it was his total undoing. King Ahaz was the ruler of Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. God wanted to help him, and Ahaz needed it desperately. Ahaz and the people of Judah were threatened by the strong nation of Assyria. Syria and Ephraim (northern Israel) were also worried and wanted to force Ahaz and his country into an alliance with them against Assyria. Ahaz hesitated, and because of his hesitation, Syria and Ephraim plotted to overthrow him and put a more cooperative king in his place. Ahaz was being threatened on all sides.

Enter the prophet Isaiah, sent from God. Isaiah offers Ahaz help, saying that God will give Ahaz a sign to insure him of God's help, but Ahaz refuses to even listen. Piously Ahaz says, "I will not put the Lord to the test" (v.12). Ahaz turns up his nose; he wants to do things his own way.

Somewhere during the conversations about their financial situation, the word bankruptcy entered the discussion. It was about this time that the family finally admitted that they did not have all the answers. To help them, they sought professional business and personal counseling and in the end their family farm was auctioned off. The mother's only regret she relates, is that they did not do this sooner.

Somewhere along the way we human beings have gotten the idea that we are supposed to have all the answers; supposed to be rugged individuals who never admit failure and never ask for help. We could call it stubbornness, pride, fear, and even sin. It is there in us, and it ends up hurting us time after time. Alone in our stubborn pride and desperately trying to keep up the appearance of happiness and success, we suffer greatly and are easily overwhelmed.

The mother also described the influence the family's home church had on them. She stated that it was the church that kept the family together. The people of the congregation supported them spiritually and emotionally. They helped them see beyond their current struggles, but this could not have happened until the family admitted that they needed help.

Ahaz decides to go it alone. He ends up becoming allies with the Assyrians, thinking that they would spare him and his people. He spends all of Judah's money to please the King of Assyria and even encourages the people to worship the Assyrian gods, as he does. Ahaz goes it along, thinking that he has all the answers. He leads his country into defeat, bankruptcy, and to the betrayal of God.

During this season of Advent, we anticipate the sign of God's coming salvation: Jesus Christ. God has promised a sign and deliverance. In Jesus Christ we have the fulfillment of God's promise. In Jesus Christ, God comes to help us, guide us, and save us from our own sin and the power of death. This child who was born so long ago, also goes the way of suffering and the cross – a further sign of God's great love and care for us. God gives us resurrection in Jesus, a further sign of the love and power of God.

Watch out for stubborn pride and individualism in your life of faith. God has done great things for you and the world. God continues to work the gracious and saving work of Jesus Christ in your life and the world around you. Welcome this grace and love, receive it with open arms, hearts and minds, and then participate in it in your daily lives. It can be very difficult to admit our need for God's help or anyone else's for that matter. But it is crucial. We begin to handle our problems when we admit that we cannot handle them alone.

Ahaz thought he held the answer to every question. It was his way or no way. There was no room for the words of Isaiah or for God's help and direction. For a long while the farm family I mentioned earlier kept all their problems to themselves, thinking they could provide all the solutions, but they could not. God doesn't want us to go it alone. God sent us a friend and saviour in Jesus Christ because this world's problems and temptations are too big for us. Jesus comes to face them, carry them, and finally defeat them. The good news is that we can turn to God and the helpers God provides. There is no shame in that; instead, it is a wise move. In this Advent season, listen to God and claim the help in God's wise word in Jesus Christ.