

Sermon Text for November 28, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 7:10-14, Matthew 1:18-25 *“Jesus, the baby born out of wedlock”*

I had a chance early in this week to get ready for this sermon. I normally take Monday off and then come in on Tuesday, but this week because it was a shortened week I came in on Monday and actually started looking at the text for today. Throughout the week I had an array of celebrations with my mom and her husband coming in on Monday, then my daughters on Tuesday and Thursday, all of my brothers and their kids came to our house on Friday, so just about each day there was an element of celebration.

This is somewhat ironic because the Scriptures find themselves in a context that is anything but ironic, in fact, we see both of our Scriptures set in a crisis that is enough to shake a nation and destroy a soon to be marriage. Even while we find ourselves steeped in the beauty of Advent with the decorations and the greenery around the sanctuary, even this beauty alone is able to bring us together. But are we able to see God’s plan through a context where things seem to move from one celebration to another.

The crises in which our stories are set almost provide God a very, very fertile ground to reveal himself and liberate his people in a way that he is able to receive all the praise, honor and glory. When we live lives that are not tested day after day in a way that our very lives are at stake, it is sometimes hard to see God’s presence in a very simple, but powerful way. Can we see God’s plan in all of us, can we see where he is leading us today? In both of our Scriptures the people of God are in crisis and God reveals himself with a very clear sign that should be unmistakable.

The message for us today is that through Jesus God will bring about redemption. There should be no doubt about that especially this first Sunday of Advent as we wait and hope for that redemption. God’s plan of redemption is for all of his people to obey and live out his kingdom which often necessitates that we understand ourselves not as the primary cornerstone of God’s plan, God has that reserved often for those whom we least expect to be given that role. Let’s read.

READ

This Scripture in Isaiah is used so often to define our Advent season and it is used to usher us in pretty close to Christmas. We all know that in vs.14 the young woman in Hebrew which is almah is Mary and that child who is born and is called Emmanuel, is our Jesus. We

don't need the Matthew Scripture to remind us of this passage for us to understand the meaning of the passage for us as Christians.

But if you just read the passage that we read and don't understand what has happened before and what God says to King Ahaz afterward we might misunderstand the meaning of this passage in Isaiah which Matthew uses to buttress his writing which depicts Jesus as this Messiah, as the one whom God has chosen to lead his people.

King Ahaz, who is the king of Judah, so the Southern end of what used to be the nation of Israel, is given a sign by God that this child will be born and before this child is able to make any decisions for himself, so while he is still a baby, he will have a military victory which will see his foes vanquished. This Scripture is a promise to the king that in a very short while he will receive a military victory which will liberate him from a very real and dangerous political crisis which had the potential of tearing his nation apart. Look at vs.16.

When we read this Scripture on this side of Jesus, knowing that Matthew identifies that baby as Jesus and that young woman as Mary, the details that arrest us are the fact that Mary was a virgin and the promise that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, which is fleshed out much more in John. But for Isaiah and the people of Judah the message in this Scripture was that salvation shall come in the form of a political redemption through a battle that Judah will win.

This promise is the consistent theme given to a person of God in throughout Scripture. God will provide victory to those who follow his plan. But what happens if this plan involves believing something that is outside of the normal, or doing something that those around us would consider completely contrary to the status quo? Well, that is actually how God prefers to act, as we will see in our Matthew Scripture. Victory will come, redemption and salvation will come, but it is often, almost exclusively, in a way that the culture around us would not expect and often would frown upon.

We begin a new sermon series today that will take us all the way past Christmas. I call it, Jesus the baby..., and each sermon defines a scene in Jesus' life when he was a baby. Today we have Jesus born out of wedlock, which is really the starting point for Jesus and his interaction with earth. But the title is highly suspect, and dramatically inaccurate. The title is pretty much to get your attention, because Jesus was not born out of wedlock. Both Luke and Matthew have Mary and Joseph married before Jesus is born, but after they realize the scandal in which they find themselves.

The title should actually be Jesus the baby, conceived out of wedlock, but I thought that was too, you know, shocking to put in print, so I put born, which is not accurate. But Jesus

conceived out of wedlock is 100% accurate, and we know that Scripture in Deuteronomy 22:23-27 tells us what should happen to a woman who is found pregnant and is not yet married. Read it on your own, it is not a good ending.

The focus of this story as we see in the angel appearing to Joseph, is not on the birth, but more on the conception and then even more on the role that this baby will play in fulfilling God's will. The shocking part of Jesus' birth is not the birth itself to a virgin, but rather the conception to a virgin through the Holy Spirit. This is a central piece of our theology that allows for the divinity of our Savior Jesus Christ. Without the virgin birth you have just another person born on this earth, not God incarnate.

We know this story in Matthew, we have heard it dozens of times. Can you imagine the conversation between Mary and Joseph, these two very young teenagers who are engaged and she tells him that she is pregnant. You know the parents are involved telling them each what to do. Can you imagine a 13 year old girl and a 14 year old boy having this conversation? Joseph comes up with a plan, and it is a good plan, it is one that basically saves the life of Mary, so it is a good plan.

As he is thinking through what he should do with a woman who had not been faithful to him, and he had proof of that, and then a child who was definitely not his, what implication that had for him for the rest of his young life, and angel appears to him and gives him the answer of what to do next. Joseph passively listens to the plan and then puts it into action. In a moment in his life where he probably faced his most intense crisis, he plays a passive role of listening to God and then obeying God and putting into motion God's commandments. Take note of that routine. Listening to God and then putting God's commandments into motion.

God's plan took the innocent but which society assumed as guilty and used it as the center piece of his plan. The outcast, the rejected as a centerpiece of God's plan is the way that God works in this world. The assurance that Joseph received, which we've known since Jesus was called the Messiah, was that this is all part of God's plan. God will ultimately work out the salvation of his people.

What is shocking to me is that Joseph in the midst of this crisis is able to hear God's voice and understand it as part of God's plan. When we are faced with a crisis how often are we able to say and rest in the fact that it is part of God's plan? Not often, we often call out to God and blame God and put God to the test. The genealogy that we find at the beginning of Matthew, and then this story of God using an unmarried virgin in which to find a home for himself, points to a God who uses the least of these to build his kingdom.

Society tends to eliminate those who do not fit into its plan of conformity. God includes all who are on the margins not just as part of his plan, but as the cornerstone of his future. Our labels that we put on people in society, or the labels that we are born with, should never define our future. A baby born out of wedlock in many of our minds is born at a huge disadvantage, but God takes this reality in Jesus and makes him the cornerstone of our faith. God takes a virgin who is pregnant and makes her the mother of God.

I want to circle back briefly to the fact that Joseph was very passive in this story, that God was the initiator in every way possible. How difficult is it for us to remain passive and listen to God and obey his commandments when we find ourselves in the midst of a crisis. Think about that. What is our go to reaction when we are in crisis? I'm guessing if you are anything like me, you want to fix it. That was Joseph's plan, I'll fix this quietly and everyone can have a new life. But God wants us to remain quiet and listen to his plan which is one that will lead to redemption and salvation.

Do we have what it takes to take a passive role before God when the stakes are extraordinarily high like they were for King Ahaz, and like they were for Joseph, even when they are life and death? If we are, then we will find that Emmanuel will reveal himself to us like he does in Matthew both here in the beginning of the Gospel, where he is promised, and also at the end of the Gospel in the Great Commission in Matthew 28 where he tells his disciples that he will be with them wherever they will go. These are the bookends to this Gospel, a promise of Emmanuel.

The plan of God was to redeem his people and the child was a sign of that redemption. Advent is a time that we are called to identify the signs of redemption that God manifests on a daily basis. But there is a warning here as well. For people like you and me, whose lives tend to follow the path of the status quo, well, God is probably going to choose to do miracles outside of the norms, and we are the norm, that is not always a great place to be with God. Keep your eyes open for God working on the margins of society, for that is where God works the strongest. Amen.