

Isaiah 7:11-14 and Hebrews 2:1-9
Hebrews: A letter for us today
“God with us”

Since Monday morning I have picked up a new morning routine. We received a good amount of snow and last year Stacy and I each purchased a pair of cross country skis because we really enjoy cross country skiing. When we lived in Russia there was a park across the street from our community and we could pretty much from October to April go cross country skiing. So Monday after the snow I went out and it was glorious, so much fun. Tuesday morning I went back out and tried to follow the tracks that I had groomed on Monday, but I discovered that the tracks had been filled by snow drift and so it was so hard to break through the top layer to get to where I had been the day before. Stacy called me while I was just about half way through wondering where I was because it was taking me so much longer. I was exhausted, dripping in sweat, and frankly wondering why I was doing this at all.

Wednesday I changed strategy, where there were clear tracks from before, I would stay with them, where they were not, I created completely new tracks. You know what I found out. It was so much easier creating new tracks and not even trying to deal with the previous day tracks, because they slowed you down, you had break through the crust and made it almost impossible. So on Thursday, I went out and didn't follow any old tracks at all, I just created a completely new track around the entire field and I finished in about half the time that I had on Tuesday. Creating new tracks in the snow is much easier than trying to unearth and follow along in the old tracks.

God wants to be in relationship with us. That is a fundamental truth to our life as followers of Jesus. Jesus came on this earth because God wants to be with us, he loves us so much that he wants to spend all of his time and our time with us. Do you remember how vs.1 of Hebrews starts, God used to, the old way that God communicated with us was through the prophets. That was the Monday track, that was new back then, but by Tuesday and Wednesday, well, after years, and centuries, and generations of disobedience and unfaithfulness, those tracks, the words of the prophets, you stopped listening to them. But now, Jesus.

Jesus for the writer of Hebrews is the new path, God who placed himself in front of us through his Son, Jesus. He was told to us from of old, but the new and complete path to the God whom we worship and love is fully revealed in Jesus and Jesus alone. There is no other path. As Jesus says: I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

So when we say that God is with us, it is not something to take for granted because we are so familiar with the Isaiah Scripture that we read this morning. Let's read.

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Isaiah 7 is the most popular, most common expression of a Scripture telling us that God is with us that we have. Matthew likes it so much that the Joseph story uses this Scripture and quotes it word for word. When we think of God with us, we think Emmanuel. The Scripture is somewhat interesting. The prophet Isaiah, just like Hebrews 1 states, tells the king that God wants him to ask for a sign. The king refuses. Note to self, if God asks you to do something, just do it. If God asks you to ask for him for a sign, ask him for a sign if something in front of you is something that you should do or not do. There is nothing wrong with asking God for a sign. In fact, here, it was wrong to not ask God for a sign because God told him to.

The prophet says fine, here is your sign, the virgin shall bear a child and you will call him Emmanuel. This happened to king Ahaz and we have used it as a prophecy for how the Messiah, the Son of God, would be born and would come to be with us. When Jesus is born we know that God is revealed to us fully, completely, and clearly. As John 1 states, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is the Emmanuel, the God with us that we understand, Jesus being born is the way in which God was physically with us in the 1st century and he then established a new path to him through the Son. God is with us, and even just as importantly, God wants to be with us.

The capstone of our faith is found in the fact that not only is God with us, but God wants to be with us, he pursues us as the prodigal son parable reflects. Such a powerful parable. A son demands his inheritance from his father, goes off and spends it, and then comes back and he is received back home with open arms. We are the ones who waste away the dreams that God has for our lives, but it is never too late, God is with us because He always wants to be with us.

Hebrews takes it a step further in describing what it means when we say that God is with us through the person of Jesus, the presence of the Son, God himself. Throughout Hebrews we see what some call the parabola of faith. What is a parabola? It is like a U shaped designed, with a line going through the U. On the left side of the U you see the Son who made creation. We know that, right? God the Son was present in creation, we see that all over Scripture. Above the line is heaven and below is earth. The parabola dips below the line, to earth, in Jesus, the Son who redeems creation, who saves creation by his life, death, and resurrection. He walked on

earth as one of us. Then in his resurrection we see him above the line again as the Son who rules creation, who sits at the right hand of God almighty. We can see what is below the line, but not what is above the line. Above the line the Son is exalted, below the line the Son suffers. That's the parabola of faith.

In Hebrews we hear that God chose to be with us even though He is completely other. The author uses Psalm 8 to describe how as humans we are lower than the angels, but still God chose to subject all of creation to us. Be fruitful and multiply, subdue creation for your purposes, God told us. Jesus chose to be like us, for a moment, for a while, even lower than the angels, even though all of creation is subject to him. Unlike Jesus, angels do not share human flesh and blood, and thus no angel's blood ever spilt and no angel's flesh is torn by spikes or thorns.

In vs.1 of chapter 2 the author states to pay attention to what you have heard. So pay attention to the old tracks, because if you lose sight of God, then you will drift away completely. Like that prodigal son. That's what this community was dealing with that was the most painful. People who were a part of their community, who had professed faith in Jesus, but now because of the danger that was around them, or because of the business of life, or because they simply did not feel like they had the time, they no longer were a part of the community. You will drift away from God if you do not pay attention to that which had been told of you. If you forget the teachings of the church, you will forget God. If you forget what you have learned, you will lose your connection to Jesus.

The author wants to assure the readers that God is still in with us. That means ultimately that God is in control. Now, let's be clear, it did not seem like God was in control. Look at vs.8, God left nothing out of his control, but let's be honest, as it is now, we don't see things as quite being under God's control. Do I need to explain anything about that. Who feels like things are more under control today than they were a year ago, or just a few months ago? For many of us it feels like things are spiraling out of control faster and faster.

The truth is, life is hard and when life is hard it is harder and harder to see God with us. Anyone who has ever fought an addiction, wept over a troubled child, discovered a malignancy, cried out for justice, wondered where to find enough food to make through another day, faced the end of a loving relationship, spent a cold night sleeping under a freezing bridge, coped with a disability, or stood in grief at a graveside, knows life is demanding, a fevered struggle. But

nevertheless, God is with us, even if we don't feel it or experience it, it doesn't mean that we have done something wrong, but it also doesn't change the fact that God is with us.

Sin and death that surround us mock the supposed dominion of God over the world. Far from being under the control of the victorious Son, the world looks chaotically out of control. But look at vs.9 where at the end of the day, what is before us? But we do see...Jesus. Jesus as one of us. There is one Scripture that will be a primary Scripture for us probably hand in hand with our Hebrews Scripture because it is the best understanding that we have in the New Testament of what it means that God is with us in Jesus. If the Isaiah Scripture is the most common God with us Scripture, then Philippians 2:6-11 is the one we need to know for Jesus as Emmanuel and what that looks like. **READ**

The character of the messenger provides the test of the importance and finality of his message. Pay attention, we are told, to that which Jesus tells us. But just as importantly, I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day. Jesus not only told us about the kingdom of God, he lived the life of righteousness that showed us the kingdom of God. Amen.