

The Findable God

Micah 5:2-5a

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2009

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is hard to find God in the circumstances of our lives.

It is hard to find God in the events that happen in our lives. When we win a prize, is God pleased with us? Is He rewarding us for a job well done? I suppose the straightforward answer is, "yes," until we think about those people who would have done a better job than we would have done to win the prize, but they were not permitted to compete for one reason or another. Or worse we understand that we cheated in order to win the prize. We never got caught, but we know what we did. Is the prize now one that says that God is rewarding us for hard work? I don't know anymore.

What if we get a raise at work? What is God telling us in that raise? Did we get a raise because we worked really hard and we are deserving of the raise? Maybe. Or maybe it is simply an expected raise for the kind of work that we do. Do any of you believe that the CEO's deserve big bonuses? Do you deserve them any less than they do? Do you deserve them any more than they do? It is hard to say. Sometimes we are paid more simply because the economy is good and our employer can afford to pay us more. Sometimes we get paid more because there is more demand for the product that we produce. Sometimes there is less demand so even though we worked just as hard in the lean years as we do in the abundant years we don't receive as much for our labor. What is God trying to tell us in these circumstances? It is hard to say.

What about the weather? If the weather is good does that mean that we are living right? If the weather is bad, does that mean that we did something wrong? If we did do something wrong, what was it? Is it something that we can change? Or if the weather is good we tell ourselves, "We'll pay for this later." If the weather is good, what was the good that we did to make the weather good so that we can do that again? There is an entire global conference in Copenhagen that is considering that very question.

What about our relationships with other people? When things are going well between my wife and I does that mean I am being a better spouse? Should I keep doing the things that we were doing when times were good? Well, yes, but only if you have the right things figured out. Sometimes what we think are the right things to do to make our relationships better aren't really the things that the other person wants us to do to make the relationship better. Many divorced people report that just before their spouse left them all of the arguments cleared up. They thought that things were great and had finally sorted themselves out until their spouse left. They were surprised. Well, the spouse had decided to leave and that was why things were better. When the spouse was still trying to make things better, there were fights. Once they decided to leave the marriage, they gave up and the fights stopped. To other spouse it seemed like things were better. They were not really better. They only seemed like they were better.

What that tells me is that the amount of tension in a relationship cannot tell you a single thing about how things will turn out.

Tests don't help either. One experienced pastor once told me that he gave a Prepare/Enrich test to a couple who tested very high in compatibility. It was the highest compatibility rating he had ever seen in his ministry. They married and were divorced after only a few years. Another couple at about the same time came to him for a wedding. He gave the Prepare/Enrich test again. This couple tested very low on the compatibility. The test predicted that their marriage would be a struggle and a fight. That couple stayed married their whole life. The test told them that it would be hard work. They put forth the hard work. They stayed married. Not even tests are a reliable measure of what God is trying to tell you.

After all what if these couples had decided whether or not to marry at all based upon these tests? What if they had looked for God speaking to them in these tests? Would they have had the right answer? At the end of experience it does not seem so.

What is God trying to tell me with this disease? What is God trying to tell me through this new person that I met today? What is God trying to tell me through my parents' illnesses? What is God trying to tell me through a sudden death? What is God trying to tell me through this traffic accident? What is God trying to tell me through my parents divorce? What is God trying to tell us through global warming? What is God trying to tell us through the President's decisions? What is God trying to tell us through Tiger Wood's affairs or David Letterman's or whomevers? What is God trying to tell me through... shall I go on? You get the idea.

It is not that God is not clear in our daily lives. The problem is that God is trying to say so much that we cannot make sense of it. In our daily lives God addresses each person and each situation and He addresses all of the variables of each situation in our lives. The problem is that we don't even know all of the variables in our lives in order to make sense of all of the information that God is sending our way in our lives. And we don't even notice everything that God says to us in our daily lives. Sometimes we pretend like bad things did not happen even though they did. Sometimes we ignore the silver lining even though it is there. God chatters at us and we need straight answers from Him. My land, look at our lives. We need straight answers from Him. We need a God that we can understand. We need a God to whom we can relate.

He is in Bethlehem.

He is in Bethlehem. If you want some straight answers from God, that is where you may find Him. He is in Bethlehem. Saying that God is in Bethlehem is a little like saying that God is in Allerton. It is not like God is in Chicago or New York. It is not like God is in London or Beijing. God is in Bethlehem. At first glance it does not make sense that He would be there, but then again it does make sense. It would be too easy for God to be in New York or London. That is far too obvious. For God to be in Bethlehem is up to His kind of challenge. God being in Bethlehem gives Him something to overcome. It gives Him a starting place that lets the whole world know that it was God who came to Bethlehem. Jesus was not successful because of His birthplace.

When you get to Bethlehem you will find a pregnant woman there. Her name is Mary. Follow her. She will give birth while she is in Bethlehem. Her son is God. She is the mother of God. If you want straight answers from God listen to Mary's Son. If you want answers from God so that you can make sense of life and know how to live, listen to Mary's Son. He has the answers. He knows the answers and He even knows the right questions to ask. He has got it all sorted out. Just listen to Him. Follow Him.

Do not be deceived while looking at this infant. He will look like other infants. Jesus will drool. He will soil His diapers. Do not be deceived by His birth. It looks like every other birth. Mary looks like every other mother except that she is a virgin. There is an indication there that this child is not ordinary. Make no mistake. This birth may look like the beginning, but this child has been around. The day after His birth, if Jesus could talk, He would be permitted to say, "You know, I wasn't born yesterday." His goings forth are from aforetime. He is not just the successor to King David, born in David's home village, successor to David's throne, fulfiller of the prophecies about David. He is from eternity. In the beginning was this child. This child was in the beginning. He was in the beginning with God and this child is God. His answers are God's answers. His directions are God's directions. His declarations are God's declarations. You want to know what God is telling you. Never mind life. Listen to this child, Mary's child, the one in Bethlehem.

This child has returned His brothers to the sons of Israel. This is not just some Old Testament return from exile. This is you and me. He has returned us to the sons of Israel. Everyone should be a son of Israel. Israel's grandfather was Abraham. Abraham was the man that God called when God realized that He was getting nowhere by working with humanity as a whole. He chose Abraham. He called Abraham. He gave Abraham a family with many descendents. The problem is that once God does that the rest of humanity is left out. What about the rest of us? Doesn't God want us anymore? Jesus has the answer to that. Do not look to your life to determine whether or not God wants you. Do not look to the circumstances of your life to determine whether or not God wants you. Look to Mary who is giving birth. Look to her son. Look to Bethlehem. The answer to whether or not God wants you is on the lips of this child. It is in His action. It is in His love.

This child has returned you to the sons of Israel. He has made you children of Abraham. For Jesus permits us Gentiles to believe in Him. Once we believe in Him we believe in the God of the Old Testament. Once we believe in the God of the Old Testament, we believe in Abraham's God. Once we believe in Abraham's God we believe in the God who really is.

Jesus has torn down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. He has torn it down. He has made the two one. He has returned us to the sons of Israel. He has made us children of God. Look for your answers there with Jesus. You will find Him in Bethlehem. He is Mary's son.

Jesus will shepherd you. He will take care of you. Jesus will shepherd you with God's strength. He will shepherd you in the Name of the Lord. Jesus has baptized you. Jesus has given you His Name. Jesus has given you the Name of His Father. Jesus has baptized you. He will shepherd you. He wants you. Do not look to your life to see whether or not Jesus is shepherding you. He is, but you may or may not be able to tell that He is. Jesus is the good shepherd. He lays down His life for the sheep. Before Abraham was He was. He lays down His life of His own accord. He has authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. In the exaltation of the Name of the Lord you find that Jesus is your shepherd. In spite of what the world, or the family or the economy or the circumstances or your friends or your teachers or your parents may tell you. Jesus is your shepherd. Listen to Him. He will take care of you. He is the child. He is Mary's son. He is the One in Bethlehem.

What is curious is the way that Jesus returns us to the sons of Israel. He does not move us to Israel or to Jerusalem. He does not move us to Bethlehem. He allows us to continue to live where we live. What Jesus does is bring Himself to us. That is what Jesus does. In order to return us to the sons of Israel, Jesus brings Himself to us. In order to make us children of God, He goes to where you are. He goes the ends of the earth.

Just as the virgin birth was one indication that Jesus was God so also the fact that this child, born in Bethlehem, of all places, has brought His Name to the ends of the earth is the other indication that He is God. He is God. He rose to the challenge of starting out in Bethlehem. He rose to that challenge and has brought His Name to you no matter where you lived. He has gone to the ends of the earth. He is God.

So if you want to know what God is telling you, listen to the Son of Mary. He does not chatter telling you everything possible. He is eloquent, telling you only what you need to know about God and what He thinks of you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.