

GOD WITH US

HERE WE ARE CELEBRATING THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT. WE HAVE LIT THE CANDLE OF LOVE. THIS ADVENT JOURNEY HAS BEEN ABOUT FAITH, HOPE, JOY AND NOW LOVE. IT HAS BEEN ABOUT USING OUR FAITH FOR THIS ADVENT JOURNEY, WHICH PRODUCES MORE HOPE WITHIN US. THE HOPE PRODUCES A JOY, KNOWING THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHANGES OUR HEARTS AND SPIRITS FROM THE INSIDE OUT. THE ACTS OF LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FORGIVENESS SHOWN ALL ARE THE RESULTS OF THIS ADVENT JOURNEY WHEN WE FAITHFULLY WALK THE ROAD.

WE KNOW UPON TAKING THIS ADVENT JOURNEY THAT GOD HAS COME TO US IN THE FLESH AND DWELLS AMONG US. HE CONTINUES TO LIVE UP TO THE NAME OF HIS SON, JESUS – EMMANUEL – MEANING “GOD WITH US”! THIS IS A PROMISE MADE BY GOD LONG AGO. THE WORD “EMMANUEL APPEARS ONLY IN ISAIAH AND MATTHEW. TO ISAIAH “EMMANUEL” MEANT DESPITE THE BAD TIMES GOD WOULD NOT REVOKE HIS PROMISE AND HE REMAINED WITH HIS PEOPLE. FOR MATTHEW IN BAD TIMES GOD WOULD SENT LIGHT TO SHINE IN THE DARKNESS.

A QUESTION FOR US IN THIS ADVENT SEASON IS “WHAT DOES “EMMANUEL” MEAN TO US TODAY? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE “GOD WITH US”? LETS LOOK BACK OVER HOW “GOD WITH US” MEANT TO PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE AND WHAT IS MEANS TO HAVE “GOD WITH US” TODAY, THIS MORNING AND ITS BLESSINGS.

GOD WAS WITH MOSES IN EXODUS, GOD WAS WITH JOSHUA, ALL OF THE KINGS AND JUDGES OF ISRAEL. GOD WAS WITH THE PROPHETS FROM ISAIAH TO EZEKIEL AS WELL AS ALL THE MINOR PROPHETS LIKE NOAH TO MALACHI. THE PSALMS ARE FILLED WITH ASSURANCES GOD IS WITH US! THERE IS A LINE IN THE 23RD PSALM “*i fear no evil for you are with me*” RIGHT UP TO THE END OF OUR LIFE ON THIS EARTH AND IN THE NEXT HE WILL BE WITH US!

LATER IN JESUS' LIFE, HE, GOD INCARNATE, PROMISES HIS DISCIPLES HE WILL BE WITH THEM “UNTIL THE END OF TIME”, **IN LUKE, MARY** IS TOLD BY THE ANGEL, “THE LORD IS WITH YOU”. LUKE ALSO TELLS US “THE LORD IS WITH” **JOHN THE BAPTIST**. NEAR THE END OF JESUS' LIFE HE TELLS THE DISCIPLES **IN JOHN** THAT HE IS NOT ALONE IN WHAT HE FACES BECAUSE “THE FATHER IS WITH ME”. ALL THROUGH THE **BOOK OF ACTS**, EXAMPLES OF THE DISCIPLES :HAVING “GOD WITH THEM” TO SPEAK BOLDLY AND DO GREAT THINGS IN HIS NAME.

THERE IS A COMMON THREAD THAT RUNS THROUGH ALL THESE PASSAGES. NO MATTER WHAT GOD CALLED THEM TO DO, HE GAVE THEM THIS ASSURANCE – EXODUS 3:12 “*I will be with you*”. WHEN MOSES “TAKEN UP”, GOD MADE THE SAME PROMISE TO JOSHUA IN THE **FIRST CHAPTER OF JOSHUA, VERSES 5-6 “*as i was with Moses, so shall I be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you*”.**

WE ARE ALL PROBABLY THINKING NOW THAT GOD WILL NEVER CALL ME! WELL, SURPRISE, ALL THESE PEOPLE WERE JUST ORDINARY, PLAIN, EVERYDAY PEOPLE LIVING THEIR LIVES UNTIL GOD CALLED THEM AND MADE THAT PROMISE TO BE WITH THEM.

JEREMIAH COMPLAINS TO GOD THAT HE IS JUST A BOY, BUT GOD DELIVERS THE PROMISE ONCE AGAIN “FOR I AM WITH YOU TO DELIVER YOU”. THE WORD OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE MUST BE POWERFUL. WHEN THAT ANGEL CAME TO MARY, A GIRL AS YOUNG AS FOURTEEN, FRIGHTENED AND CONFUSED THAT SHE WAS TO

BEAR THE SON OF GOD. THE ANGEL SPOKE WORDS FROM GOD THAT HE WAS WITH HER. THE RESPONSE FROM THIS YOUNG, CONFUSED GIRL WAS "HERE I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, LET IT BE ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD". JUST THINK OF THE POWER IN THOSE WORDS OF THE ANGEL!!!

OVER ALL THE NOISE OF THE WORLD, GOD HAS A MESSAGE FOR YOU TOO. HE HAS THE SAME POWERFUL WORDS THE ANGEL GAVE MARY - "*Lord I Am With You*".

DID YOU ALSO NOTICE THAT IN ALL THE EXAMPLES I GAVE, THAT "GOD IS WITH US", HIS PRESENCE IN US IS DYNAMIC, THERE IS A PURPOSE OF "GOD BEING WITH US". THERE WAS WITH THE HELP OF GOD SOMETHING TO BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR HIS PURPOSES - NO MATTER HOW MANY EXCUSES WE COME UP WITH LIKE "I AM NOT THE RIGHT PERSON", "IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME". MAYBE WE ARE CONFUSED AND PLAIN SCARED! GOD WILL COME BACK WITH THE SAME WORDS AND THE POWER IN THOSE WORDS HE SPOKE TO MOSES "*I WILL BE WITH YOU*". **GOD WILL BE WITH WHOMEVER HE CALLS FOR HIS PURPOSES.**

NOW WE MIGHT ASK WHAT "BACKUP" COMES WITH "*GOD BEING WITH US*"? WHAT DID THOSE WHO ANSWERED HIS CALL HAVE THAT TODAY WE TEND TO SAY "OH, THOSE WEREN'T ORDINARY PEOPLE"? HERE ARE A FEW "BLESSINGS" WE HAVE WHEN "GOD IS WITH US".

FIRST, THE PRESENCE OF GOD WILL GIVE US PEACE AND REST. JUST LIKE MARY AFTER THE ANGEL'S VISIT, SHE HAD A PEACE ABOUT THE COMING EVENTS. MOSES RECEIVED THE SAME IN WORDS GOD SPOKE TO HIM "MY PRESENCE WILL GO WITH YOU, AND I WILL GIVE YOU PEACE AND REST" JESUS PROMISED WHEN HE LEFT HIS DISCIPLES, "*I LEAVE YOU MY PEACE*".

SECONDLY, THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH US GIVES US PROTECTION AS WE GO THROUGH THE STORMS, WALK THE VALLEYS, AND EXPERIENCE THE DARK NIGHTS. IN ISAIAH GOD PROMISES ISAIAH PROTECTION REPHRASED BY THE MESSAGE "*When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end— Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior.*" THIS IS THE EVERYDAY, REAL LIFE APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE TO OUR LIVES. THE VERSES DO NOT SAY WE WILL NOT GO THROUGH TOUGH TIMES, EVEN TIMES WHEN WE WANT TO THROW UP OUR HANDS AND SAY "I QUIT", BUT, BUT GOD PROMISES HE IS WITH US JUST LIKE HE WAS WHEN HIS SON WENT TO THE CROSS!!!

THIRD, GOD WILL GIVE US WISDOM SO WHEN WE FACE THOSE CONFUSING AND DIFFICULT TIMES THAT WE CAN'T SEE OR FEEL OUR WAY THROUGH THE DARKNESS HE IS WITH US. HE WILL GUIDE US WHEN WE LISTEN FOR THAT VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. IN MATTHEW 28:20 JESUS TELLS US THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES WE ARE NOT TO WORRY OR BE ANXIOUS, BUT THAT THE WORDS WILL COME BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THE FOURTH BLESSING WE RECEIVE BY GOD WITH US IS HE PROVIDES A PATHWAY AND GUIDANCE FOR US. WHEN SOMETHING "APPEARS" TO BE INSURMOUNTABLE, GOD WITH US WILL PROVIDE US A WAY. THERE IS A VERSE FROM MATTHEW 19:26 "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" JESUS IN THE VERSES BEFORE THIS TALKED ABOUT HOW HARD IT WAS FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HOW MUCH EASIER IT WAS FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE. NO MATTER WHAT WE LOOK AT, WHETHER IT BE FINANCIAL OR SEEMINGLY OUT OF REACH WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

WHEN GOD IS WITH US HE WILL GIVE US PEOPLE WE NEED AT THAT TIME. 'GOD WITH US' MEANS HE IS THERE SO THAT WHEN WE TURN TO HIM WE RECEIVE AN ANSWER. THE ANSWER MAY COME THROUGH A WORD OF WISDOM, THROUGH ANOTHER PERSON OR GOD MAY "SPEAK" THROUGH HIS WORD TO US. BY NOT STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES WE MAY MISS AN IMPORTANT WORD GOD HAS FOR US.

WE CAN'T PUT GOD IN A BOX AND SAY THIS IS THE ONLY WAY HE ANSWERS US. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD SENT PEOPLE TO HELP. ASA, THE KING, WAS TOLD BY AZARIAH THAT GOD WAS WITH HIM. ASA DID THE RIGHT THING BY REMOVING IDOLS. THE PEOPLE HELPED HIM AND THE NATION WAS BLESSED.

WE DON'T HAVE TO "DO IT ALONE", BECAUSE GOD IS WITH US AND WHEN PEOPLE SEE GOD IS IN THE ASK, THEY WILL COME TO HELP. WE HAVE DONE MANY MISSION PROJECTS LIKE HEIFER, HELPED THOSE AROUND DES MOINES. PEOPLE "SEE" IT IS A CAUSE GOD DESIRES BECAUSE WE ARE IN MINISTRY TO THOSE JESUS HAS TOLD US TO MINISTER TO – THE SICK, HUNGARY, THE "NAKED" AND IN PRISON. WHEN GOD IS WITH US WE CAN "SEE" THROUGH HIS "SPIRITUAL EYES" AND DO GOOD.

There is a story about two elder ladies. They were both in their young 80s. They were spinsters living in North Dakota. They were not only living in North Dakota, they were living on a farm in North Dakota. It was not only a farm in North Dakota, it was a dumpy farm in North Dakota. It was the dumpiest farm you have ever seen in North Dakota. The chicken coop was falling down. The barn was falling down. The rusted machinery was falling apart, and the old rusted spinsters were falling apart. These were two spinsters and they were as tough as nails. They had weathered every storm for the past sixty years and they were tough. Well, it so happened that a nephew came to visit them one fall day from the city, and he took out his camera to take a picture of his weather worn aunts, with the barn and the chicken coop and the rusted machinery in the background. The aunts just stood there, strait and stiff for the picture. The nephew took a picture and later sent them a copy. The aunts just loved that photograph, and they decided to use it for a Christmas card that year. At the top of their picture, they put the words, Merry Christmas, in bold, black letters. And at the bottom of the picture, in big bold letters were the words: God is with us in our mess. That is the message of Advent and Christmas. It is that God is with us...in our mess. The message of Christmas is not that God protects us from the messes of life. It is not that we are somehow insulated from the messes of life, but rather in the very messiness of life, God is still Emmanuel, God is still with us, giving us strength and understanding and wisdom to live in this world.

MAY WE AS WE FINISH THIS ADVENT JOURNEY REMEMBERING GOD IS WITH US. MAY WE REMEMBER THE BLESSINGS OF EMMANUEL - GOD WITH US - PEACE, PROTECTION, WISDOM, GUIDANCE, AND PEOPLE.

MAY THIS ADVENT JOURNEY BEEN ONE OF INCREASING YOUR FAITH, LIFTING YOUR HOPE, INCREASING YOUR JOY AND SHARING YOUR LOVE. AMEN.