

# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

**Isaiah 36:1-3; 13-20; 37:1-7; 2:14**

**THANKSGIVING SUNDAY**

**November 18, 2018**

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On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, it has become a recent tradition to celebrate our national holiday today, because most people are either too busy or not available to attend a mid-week worship service.

So this morning, we pray the prayers and sing the hymns that acknowledge our national day of Thanksgiving.

This year, we have added a fellowship luncheon, featuring a traditional Thanksgiving day menu, which will be served in our Social Hall immediately following this service.

Our thanks to Mary Goodman, who serves as our events coordinator, and her ‘helping hands’ for arranging this meal and festively setting our tables.

Maybe next year, this fellowship meal could morph into an occasion for inviting our Food Pantry patrons and clients to share this meal together with us.

Speaking of our Food Pantry, I want to thank Jim Cordery, our wonderful corps of volunteers, and our generous donators and supporters, for making Thanksgiving dinner a reality for 85 area families so that they may give their thanks.

It is those who supply the hands for God’s work that truly deserve our thanks.

Thank you!

This morning, our Narrative Lectionary Old Testament tour takes us to one of its greatest books — Isaiah.

In the Hebrew scriptures’ second major section — the Prophets — Isaiah occupies the first position among the Latter, or Major Prophets, including also Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Who is this man, Isaiah, and what is known about him?

His name means literally “*Yahweh Saves.*”

Of his family of origin, Isaiah, himself, says at the outset of his Book that he was the son

of Amoz.

Rabbinic sources suggest that Isaiah may have come from royal lineage, which might explain his regular access to Judah's kings.

The Book of Isaiah reveals that he had two sons, whose names even carried a prophetic message of great importance.

One was **Shear-Joshub**, which means "*a remnant will return.*"

Isaiah's second son was **Maker-Shalal-Hash-Bag**, which translates "*swift is the plunder and speedy the prey.*"

Tradition has it that Isaiah died a martyr's death during the reign of King Manasseh, Hezekiah's son.

Like other prophets, Isaiah possessed a heart devoted to God, and a zeal for God as a messenger who spoke the words God had given him.

While being the longest prophetic book of 66 chapters, scholars have divided it into three historical periods.

In Part One, from Chapters 1-39, Isaiah addresses Judah during the time of the Assyrian threat in the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Part Two, from Chapters 40-55, speaks to the latter years of the Babylonian exile.

Part Three, from Chapters 56-66, concerns the rebuilding of Judah after the return of the Jews from their exile.

For us Christians, Isaiah is an important book.

It is one of the most quoted books in the New Testament, and it speaks of a hopeful future in the coming of a Messiah.

As the title of this message suggests, it can be called "The Gospel according to Isaiah."

The Gospel according to Isaiah.

What is meant by that?

When we hear the term, gospel, we immediately call to mind the four Gospels in the New Testament, where gospel literally means '*good news.*'

However, the term, '*good news,*' occurs also in the Old Testament, as in these two verses from the Book of Isaiah:

***"Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news, lift up, do not fear, say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'"*** (40:9) and

***"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed . . ."*** (61:1).

As Christians, we look at the ‘gospel’ of Isaiah as the gospel of incarnation, love, forgiveness, and liberation.

The command phrase, “*fear not*,” or “*Do not be afraid*,” becomes something of a refrain in the second half of Isaiah, where it comes as a word of hope, comfort, and good news.

Jesus and the angels will speak this same command during threatening times, and especially at Jesus’ incarnation and His resurrection.

The primary thing is the presence of God, the God who is “with you,” that is, the One who is incarnate among you.

Isaiah’s “*fear not*” is anything but an equivalent to “**Don’t worry, it will be all right.**”

What the words of Isaiah intend to do is to banish the fear.

Everything may well not be all right, at least in the sense that nothing can go wrong.

But when things do go wrong, as they have, and as they will, the promise remains:

**the Lord is with you.**

Another aspect of Isaiah’s multifaceted good news is the proclamation of what God has done and is doing for humanity and creation in general, and for Israel in particular.

We see a great example of Isaiah’s good news in this morning’s selected reading.

Since it is a rarely heard narrative, let me give you some background.

As I said earlier, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah fall under the historical period of Sennacherib’s invasion, and God’s deliverance.

When Sennacherib ascended Assyria’s throne in 704 BC, after the death of his father, Sargon II, the accession of a new king prompted the uprising of subject people, especially in the outlying areas of Assyria’s expanded empire.

The Book of II Kings records that Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah came in response to Hezekiah’s revolt.

Realizing an invasion from the new Assyrian king, King Hezekiah ordered the construction of a great cistern beneath the city of Jerusalem, to enable the city to hold out while under siege.

When Sennacherib appeared with his army, he demanded a great payment of gold, or Hezekiah and Jerusalem would be destroyed.

The Assyrian field commander challenged the Judeans by questioning their confidence.

How did they hope to prevail against the menacing Assyrian war machine?

Would they trust in Egypt to save them?

Could they even trust in their own God, when Hezekiah had angered Him by removing all His altars and high places?

The field commander then encouraged surrender.

Hezekiah's response differed greatly from the response of his father. Isaiah had assured Ahaz of God's deliverance, but Ahaz had refused to believe. At this point, Hezekiah had no assurance of God's promised deliverance, but went anyway to the temple to seek the Lord's aid.

Hezekiah also sought encouragement from Isaiah.

Hezekiah asked Isaiah to pray for God's intervention.

Isaiah sent a reply that the king was not to fear, for God had the situation well in hand.

Now Hezekiah had two positions to consider:

- the demonstrated military power of Assyria, as highlighted by the field commander's speech, or
- the promise of God's deliverance relayed by the prophet Isaiah.

Which would YOU choose?

Hezekiah's response revealed both the depth of his faith and his character.

He spread the Assyrian king's written ultimatum before the Lord in the temple, and prayed fervently.

He pleaded with God to give ear to all of King Sennacherib's insults.

Of course, Sennacherib had defeated the gods of other nations.

They were but wood and stone.

Hezekiah asked God to deliver Judah, that all the earth might see the power of Judah's God.

Isaiah announced that God would turn Sennacherib around and drive him back to Assyria, for God had not forgotten His promise that, if David's descendants were faithful, they would never lack a king on the throne.

God fulfilled His promise of deliverance.

The Lord's angel struck down the Assyrian camp with a pestilence, and Sennacherib, and what was left of his army, retreated back to Assyria.

Later, in Chapter 37, we are told that 185,000 Assyrians died at God's hands.

No details are given.

None are needed.

Yahweh was faithful to His promises.

Beloved people of God,

God is faithful to His promises with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and prophets like Isaiah.

And God is also faithful to the promises made by His Son, our Lord and Savior,

Jesus Christ, of forgiveness and eternal life, now and forever.

Isaiah called his people, as Jesus calls us, to recognize God's ways, which are not ours.

Knowing God is the first step, and knowing God's ways is the second step.

The third step and the desired destination, as we heard last week from Micah, is walking in His ways.

This morning's bulletin cover portrays the great vision of Isaiah regarding the end of time, when God comes in judgment.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday in 2018, let us be mindful of God and God's ways.

God wants us to use our energy and resources to keep creation healthy, and to grow food for all.

History shows that famine leads to war, and food security promotes peace.

That's the purpose of Isaiah's vision and gospel.

God wants the tools of violence to be transformed into tools for food production.

It is good for us to give God thanks for the food we receive spiritually and physically.

May we share it with others and spread God's mercy and peace to everyone everywhere.

**AMEN**