

WELCOME 9 December 2018 – 2 Advent '18 C

Isaiah 9:2-7 & Luke 1:26-55

(series theme slide) Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship...

Thor...Now that I have the ladies' attention...When most folks hear the words "Mighty God" something like him comes to mind. Mighty God...avenger...fixer...sets things right right now...hammer to the bad guys...and big guns...nice abs.

There's plenty to suggest that's not just our Hollywood god-image, that's the way most of us would like the real God...the Father to be...avenger...fixer...set things right right now...there to fix things up, serve us & make us look good...life go well.

But God's ways are not our ways. God's call to birth his presence into this world inherently messes up the order of life that we establish...God rarely comes to just tidy up a bit. The Mighty God; who comes into the womb of the mess of this world, to live in a mess he didn't create and redeem us from our mess...is as the prophets promised, "*a consuming fire*" "*mountains quake in his presence*" "*voice roars & thunders*" (Dt 4:24, Is 64:1, Ps 29:4)

And when that word of promise & that presence come to us...all things are possible ...all things are made new...but it gets a little messy when the Mighty God takes hold of us.

We'll explore & experience that today.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Is 11:1, 4-5

O Master, Lord above all lords, Mighty Adonai, leader of all God's people, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: You came to us in your Son & breathed your Spirit into our lifeless flesh to make us new & make us yours. Come again today in your might to redeem us with an outstretched arm. Drive back darkness with the light of your love. We pray Jesus in your powerful name...Amen

2 ADVENT '18 C – CHRSTMASMESS: MIGHTY GOD

FAITH CHAT:

1. Identify yourself: "I like life to be 'neat'. I don't mind life being 'cluttered.' Spouse/kids say?"
2. Has God ever messed up your plans/life? How? What did you do?

Steve Smith is a Canadian comedic actor. His TV persona is Red Green. Red is a self-proclaimed jack-of-all-trades Mr Fixit inventor. He'll grab some duct tape, old car parts & some leftover bits from the shed...say plumbing related...and make something amazing! Functional? I doubt it, but it's good clean fun. His money quote: & you've heard me use it before: "If the women don't find you handsome, they should at least find you handy." He's a 1st order problem solver...fixer extraordinaire...even things that weren't broken & problems you didn't know you had. Have you ever met someone like that?

I threw some words into a search engine & discovered that lots of folks see God as a heavenly Red Green. Look at some book titles. Evidently...some folks truly believe God's a fixer/Mr Fixit. You've got a problem they think God's job is "solve it."

I stumbled on some research out of the US I suspect similar results here Dr Kenda Dean & her team interviewed 3,300 American teenagers b/t ages of 13-17 (follow-up phone surveys w/ the parents), AND face-to-face follow-up w/ nearly 300 of the teens. These were "church kids" who had more than passing engagement with Christian faith & the questions probed their relationship w/ God: exist/involved in life – what God wants – purpose of life – how involved is God in your life...2 dominant views of God emerged: "cosmic therapist" God's job is to help me feel good & do good or "divine butler" God's job is to come to me when called to do something for me. Let's think aloud... Why would people think that way? Would you think those are images of God some folks live with here? For me...it seems that our world covets good health, wellbeing & success...AND there's this expectation that if God is really doing his God-thing he ought to be able to deliver the goods.

Here's the funny thing...Nowhere in the Bible is God ever pictured like that. Nowhere do the Scriptures ever portray God the Father as anything so benign. At NO POINT do the Bible's writers describe their encounters w/ The Almighty anywhere near that sort of milquetoast "Band-Aid & a kiss on the cheek" experience.

Even a skim-the-pages reading of the Bible tells you it's exactly opposite...I shared these earlier but they're worth a 2nd look: Dt 4:15ff...Moses warns God's people to worship Yahweh alone...to steer far clear of the idolatry of their pagan nation neighbours: *"23 So be careful not to break the covenant the Lord your God has made with you. Do not make idols of any shape or form, for the Lord your God has forbidden this. 24 The Lord your God is a devouring fire; he is a jealous God...26 Today I call on heaven & earth as witnesses against you. If you break my covenant, you will quickly disappear from the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will live there only a short time; then you will be utterly destroyed. 27 For the Lord will scatter you among the nations, where only a few of you will survive."* I'm not seeing cosmic therapist or divine butler yet?

Ps 29:3-5 - The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea. The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty sea. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars...shatters the cedars of Lebanon

Is. 64:1 Oh that you would burst from the heavens & come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence! Maybe I'm missing it...cosmic therapist or divine butler?

The contrast is even clearer as God relates to humans...God takes hold of scruffy old pagan Abraham...Abe's life is never the same. God calls Abe/Sarah to a move across nations to live as foreigners in the unknown of a promise. Abe has to trust a long-coming promise & be willing to sacrifice his son his only son his firstborn son Isaac. Abe's life is radically blessed...but at no point, for a man whose relationship with God begins around his 80th birthday, is it anything less than messy...

Moses is in hiding tending his father-in-law's sheep & has a nice life up to the point God speaks to him from a burning bush. But for the rest of his existence he's saddled with God's people & the work of leading them out of slavery in Egypt through the wilderness for 40 years to the land God has promised them. His one-on-one conversations w/ God transform him...such that he has to veil his face because the radiant glory of God that has permeated him scares the people. He suffers their faithlessness & lapses into idolatry & pleads with God on their behalf so God doesn't wipe them off the face of the earth...AND he never sets foot in the land of promise. He dies outside the fulfillment of the promise.

Jump ahead...Esther is the queen...She's leading a charmed life when her people, God's people, are threatened with extinction so she has to risk her life to save the nation...The Prophets...who wants to lie on the street besieging a brick for a year? Which of us will volunteer to marry a prostitute who hasn't given up the trade? Jeremiah is up to his armpits

sinking in the mud of a dry well...declares that God has overpowered him. John the Baptist in his prison cell bent across a block of wood waiting for the axe to fall asking questions about Jesus' identity...It doesn't get any messier than that...

Mary is maybe 15-16 years old...From Gabriel's first word her life is never the same. Imagine the conversation with her parents...the one with Joseph by the time they marry...The stares. The rumours. The snide ugly biting comments in the market. Her morals & Joseph's honour will forever be questioned. They'll spend the next 30 years completely confused & at times heartbroken by their son. From "Greetings favoured woman!" her nicely ordered life is a mess...

Yet Mary sings a song that gushes with praise for the Mighty God who makes a mess of the world's value system so that human hearts could be aligned rightly with the Father's. Mary rejoices in the Mighty God who upends our quest for wellbeing & success – throws cold water over our drive to acquire achieve & accumulate...to actually walk in our world so we could live with him forever.

Mary sings that the Mighty God chooses...actually chooses to dwell w/in the womb of a woman-child. God actually chooses suffering. God experiences the depths of despair. God understands what it means to be vulnerable & weak. God knows all about these things because God chooses to be there. That's what Mary grows to understand over the course of her life. That's the Gospel...that rather than sweep the mess under the carpet or hide it in cupboards around the place...God enters it ...lives it and then by his death & resurrection Jesus redeems it:

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,

and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.

His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.

He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful.

For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

Mary glimpses ever so briefly the life-transforming reality that Mighty God really means Mighty Love...Mighty God really means Mighty Saviour...Mighty God really means Mighty Forgiveness – Mighty Mercy – Mighty Compassion – Mighty Sacrifice Mighty Power unleashed in the teeth of our mess weakness frailty faltering failing falling...Mighty God means no matter what you've done /failed to do – been – who you think you are what you think you ought to be – Mighty God means this child will take into his own flesh the sin & evil that devour our joy & steal our hope. Mighty God means this child will take into his own flesh the sin & evil & death that drag us down & throw darkness even into our brightest moments. Mighty God means the striking paradox that God is actually present when God seems to be most absent! That God is with us when we feel most desperately alone. That God loves us when we feel most decidedly rejected. That God in Christ is at work to bring us home to himself when we feel farthest adrift & dreadfully lost.

Mighty God means that God who made all that is – passionately love each & every soul on this planet & commits himself to be our intimate companion in his Son Jesus ...especially at those times when everything hurts – nothing is right when even the bottom is above where we are – when we've failed again when we can't seem to muster up faith again when we can't open our mouths to pray again...even to the grave that finally claims each of us...because nothing is impossible with God...and on the other side of that grave Mighty God promises a resurrection and a life with no end...because that death that grave was the cost that Son paid for us...

We know who Mighty God is not...

because we know who Mighty God is.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming.

Come to us not as we demand but as you desire.

Come to us according to your will not our wants.

Come to us for your purpose alone.

Come to us by your Spirit that makes all things new.

Come to us to make our mess your masterpiece.

Come to us to send us to the world in your Name...Amen