

Sermon: *Trusting the GPS*

Preacher: Charlie Fuller

Text: Isaiah 7:10-16

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When I was a kid, I was the navigator for our family vacations every summer. It was my job to plan the route and then call out the turns to my dad as he drove. Dad gave me that job even before my older brother left home. It instilled in me a love for maps and travel that lasts until this day. Sometimes I'll have a map open on my computer, taking a trip in my mind. Cindy will walk by and ask me where I am and how my trip's going.

The transition from paper maps to computer screens and GPS was a wonderful revelation for me. I still have a big folder full of paper maps that I haven't looked at in years. Yet on a computer or in my car, I still find it fascinating that I can enter a couple of different places and the GPS will give me one or more different routes to get from Point A to Point B.

But sometimes, because I'm pretty confident in my ability with maps, the suggested route doesn't make any sense to me. Sometimes I just don't want to go the way it suggests. When that happens, I tell Cindy that I'm going to "defy the Google." Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't.

In today's text we're going back to where we were for the first two Sundays of Advent. King Ahaz and his people are under siege. The Assyrians are outside the gates of the city. The people inside don't know if they're going to starve to death or be savagely attacked. Ahaz needs a sign from God and Isaiah is there to deliver.

But Ahaz refuses the sign. Isaiah says that all he has to do is open up the laptop and there it is. Ahaz says, no, he won't put

God to the test. Ahaz is a little too hesitant for a king who is surrounded on all sides by his enemies. Ahaz is defying the sign being delivered by Isaiah.

Isaiah tears into Ahaz with the exasperation of an ancient prophet. He says, "Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?" Then Isaiah says, "Ok, don't ask for a sign. God will give you one anyway."

And what is the sign? It's not what Ahaz was expecting. And it's not what we would expect, either. It wasn't a set of curses like God used to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt. It wasn't a fleet of winged chariots to destroy the enemies of the people of God.

No, Isaiah says, there's going to be a baby. A young woman will bear a son: a vulnerable, crying, diaper-soiling, always-hungry, constantly-needing-attention baby. I'm sure Ahaz could just imagine how fearful their enemies would be of *this* sign.

But it wasn't just any sign. The baby would have a very specific name:

Immanuel. God with us.

I'm so grateful that Finnley was here with his family to help lead us in worship today. How appropriate that we experience "up close and personal" how vulnerable God chose to become. A baby can do almost nothing for themselves. A baby needs almost constant care. A baby symbolizes the exact opposite of power.

A baby represents God's *complete* descent into human experience. God chose to be in *all* ways what we are. To experience vulnerability. To experience the entirety of what it means to be human. So that God could fully and completely

empathize with God's creation. To know what it's like to be one of us.

Even as our times seem so very hard, when chaos and division seem to reign in our shared culture, times were even worse for Ahaz and the people of Judah. And times were even worse in the first century when Jesus was born and lived and navigated life in human form.

We're talking this Advent about God's anointed one, God's chosen one, the Messiah. We've been preparing for his coming, which we will celebrate Tuesday evening in song and word. But if I might be so bold, let me make something clear about God's chosen one. If you hear someone claim that a contemporary figure – one from *any* profession, from *any* country, from *any* political party – is God's chosen one, you'd better ask for some clarification. It's very likely that someone is blowing smoke. Maybe the very worst kind of smoke. There is only one anointed by God, chosen by God to be our Messiah. That is Jesus. The one whose birth we specifically celebrate this week.

Immanuel. God with us.

God says, I'm there. That has to come first. Before our doctrine. Before our mission. Even before our community. Before anything else. God, who Scripture says was in all ways tempted as we are is here, is *with* us. God has condescended to become one of us. The Creator has indwelt the created. God joins us here in community. As Eugene Peterson says, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."

This same God is the one...

Who knows the feel of straw around his tiny body,

Who knows the fatigue of hard work in his father's carpenter shop,
Who knows how to laugh at a good joke,
Who knows the feel of sweat on his brow and dust in his sandals,
Who knows hunger and thirst,
Who knows what it's like to struggle to get by,
Who knows what it's like to live through the division and chaos of his time,
Who knows what it's like to lose his best friend,
Who knows ...the feel of tears running down his cheeks,

Who also knows the sting of the lash and the pounding of nails through his hands.

This is the sign that Isaiah says is coming. It is God, God's-self. God become human. God moving into the neighborhood.

During this beautiful season, this time when our hearts are a little more tender, when our minds are a little more open to God's voice and Spirit, let me ask this question:

How can you and how can I be more fully present to the God who became fully present to us?

What we celebrate this season is not just another sign. It's the coming of God's very self in human form – as a sign of how to live a life of faith, as we observe the life Jesus lived, and listen to what he had to say, and internalize the very person of Christ. We learn to live faithfully by working to be fully present to the Creator who has become fully present to us – in the form of one of us. That's the ultimate act of love – to become one of us. That's what gives us hope, brings us peace, instills in us joy, and fills us with love this blessed Advent season.

May this be true for us all year long. Thanks be to God! Amen.

