

“BORNE FOR YOU”

(Before scripture)

LAST WEEK WE LOOKED AT A PASSAGE FROM THE 7TH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH WHERE KING AHAZ WAS TEMPTED TO FORM AN ALLIANCE WITH THE WORLD POWER OF ASSYRIA IN AN EFFORT TO THWART THE ENEMIES OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

ISAIAH WARNED HIM AGAINST MAKING SUCH AN ALLIANCE.

IN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE – THE 9TH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH - THE PROPHET MAKES REFERENCE TO SOMEONE WHO WILL BE BORN WHO WILL HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TURN THINGS AROUND FOR THE PEOPLE.

IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE THAT HE'S REFERRING TO HEZEKIAH, AHAZ'S SON.

GREAT THINGS WERE EXPECTED OF HIM.

HE WAS EXPECTED TO BE THE PROVERBIAL “LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.”

UNFORTUNATELY, HEZEKIAH DIDN'T MEET THOSE EXPECTATIONS & ISAIAH LATER TRANSFERS HIS HOPES TO A FUTURE, UNDEFINED TIME & UNDESIGNATED INDIVIDUAL.

STANDING ON THIS SIDE OF HISTORY, WE KNOW WHO THAT WAS.

WE KNOW THE ONE ABOUT WHOM ISAIAH IS WRITING IN THIS CHAPTER, EVEN IF *HE* DOESN'T.

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING IS ISAIAH 9:2-7.

(After scripture)

I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED SONG LYRICS.

I'M FASCINATED AT THE WAY A SIMPLE LINE IN A SONG CAN SAY SO MUCH.

THE WORDS OF A POPULAR SONG CAN HAVE A PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON IT LISTENERS.

I COMPILED A LIST OF SOME OF MY FAVORITES.

I'M SURE MANY OF YOU COULD COME UP WITH A SIMILAR LIST, BUT I'M HERE & YOU'RE THERE SO I GET TO SHARE SOME OF THE LINES ON MY LIST.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF MY FAVORITES:

“...A MAN HEARS WHAT HE WANTS TO HEAR & DISREGARDS THE REST.”

“...AND IN THE END, THE LOVE YOU TAKE IS EQUAL TO THE LOVE YOU MAKE.”

“...YOU BETTER START SWIMMING OR SINK LIKE A STONE...”

“...WHAT BETTER PLACE THAN HERE – WHAT BETTER TIME THAN NOW...”

“...MEET THE NEW BOSS – SAME AS THE OLD BOSS...”

“...WHY AM I DYING TO LIVE WHEN I'M JUST LIVING TO DIE?”

AND FINALLY, THERE'S EVEN A LYRIC THAT ATTESTS TO THE POWER OF POPULAR SONGS – *“WE LEARNED MORE FROM A THREE MINUTE RECORD THAN WE EVER LEARNED IN SCHOOL.”*

THOSE ARE JUST A FEW ON MY LIST OF FAVORITE LINES AND, ADMITTEDLY, FROM A PARTICULAR GENRE & A PARTICULAR ERA.

I'M SURE YOU COULD COME UP WITH YOUR OWN LIST.

DURING ADVENT THIS YEAR WE'RE FOCUSING ON PARTICULAR LINES FROM HYMNS OF THE SEASON.

LAST WEEK WE LOOKED AT A LINE FROM "O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL" – *"DEATH'S DARK SHADOWS PUT TO FLIGHT."*

TODAY OUR FOCUS IS ON A LINE FROM THE WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX SONG, "WHAT CHILD IS THIS."

THE SONG WAS INITIALLY A POEM WRITTEN BY DIX & ENTITLED "THE MANGER THRONE."

HE WROTE IT IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY BEFORE HE REACHED THE AGE OF 30.

DIX WROTE THIS HYMN, ALONG WITH A NUMBER OF OTHERS, AFTER HE HAD SURVIVED A NEAR-FATAL ILLNESS & THEN ENDURED A PERIOD OF DEEP DEPRESSION.

THE LINE I'D LIKE US TO LOOK AT IS – IN MY ESTIMATION – ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND THAT WE SING ALL YEAR.

WORDS CAN TAKE ON DIFFERENT MEANINGS FOR US – DEPENDING ON THEIR CONTEXT.

I HEARD ABOUT A GRANDFATHER WHO DECIDED THAT SHOPPING FOR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS HAD BECOME TOO DIFFICULT.

ALL HIS GRANDCHILDREN HAD EVERYTHING THEY NEEDED, SO HE DECIDED TO SEND THEM EACH A CHECK.

ON EACH CARD HE WROTE:

'MERRY CHRISTMAS, GRANDPA'

P.S. 'BUY YOUR OWN PRESENT!'

OVER THE HOLIDAYS, THOUGH, GRANDPA THOUGHT HIS GRANDCHILDREN WERE JUST SLIGHTLY DISTANT.

IT WEIGHED ON HIS MIND INTO THE NEW YEAR.

THEN ONE DAY HE WAS CLEANING HIS STUDY AND UNDER A BUNCH OF MAGAZINES, HE FOUND A LITTLE PILE OF CHECKS FOR HIS GRANDCHILDREN.

HE HAD COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN TO PUT THEM IN WITH THE CHRISTMAS CARDS!

WHEN THEY READ HIS P.S., IT WAS MORE OF A "BUY YOUR OWN PRESENT" THAN "BUY YOUR OWN PRESENT!"

WORDS TAKE ON A DIFFERENT MEANING, DEPENDING ON THEIR CONTEXT.

SO IT IS WITH THIS GREAT LINE FROM DIX'S HYMN:

"NAILS, SPEAR SHALL PIERCE HIM THROUGH, THE CROSS BE BORNE FOR ME, FOR YOU..."

I WAS ASKED MORE THAN ONCE THIS WEEK WHY THE WORD "BORNE" HAD AN "E" ON THE END OF IT ON THE SIGN OUT FRONT.

IT IS AN INGENIOUS USE OF LANGUAGE BY WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX THAT GIVES US THAT LINE.

HERE WE ARE – LESS THAN 3 WEEKS FROM OUR CELEBRATION OF JESUS BEING BORN (NO "E") – AND OUR FOCUS IS TURNED TO THE CROSS.

THAT'S PRECISELY AS IT SHOULD BE.

TODAY, WE CELEBRATE HOLY COMMUNION.

WE WILL DO THE SAME ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE WONDER WHY WE DO THAT.

“WHY HAVE COMMUNION ON CHRISTMAS EVE - ON THE NIGHT WHEN WE'RE FOCUSING OUR ATTENTION ON THE BIRTH OF JESUS?”

IT'S BECAUSE YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER.

SHARING COMMUNION DURING ADVENT & SHARING COMMUNION ON CHRISTMAS EVE REMINDS US THAT THE CRADLE IN A STABLE IS JOINED BY THE CROSS ON A HILL AS SYMBOLS THAT SUMMARIZE WHO JESUS WAS & WHY HE CAME.

THE CRADLE & THE CROSS CANNOT BE SEPARATED.

JUST AS LUKE GIVES US THE GLORIOUS ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS, HE ALSO CONNECTS IT TO HIS DEATH.

IN HIS FIRST TWO CHAPTERS, HE GIVES US THE BEAUTIFUL STORY OF MARY'S SONG, THE BIRTH IN THE MANGER IN BETHLEHEM, THE ANGELS SINGING & THE SHEPHERDS PRAISING.

BUT THEN LUKE GIVES US ANOTHER STORY.

WHEN MARY & JOSEPH TOOK JESUS TO THE TEMPLE TO “PRESENT HIM TO THE LORD” AS WAS THE CUSTOM OF THE JEWS, A MAN NAMED SIMEON APPEARED.

HE TOOK JESUS IN HIS ARMS, RAISED HIS EYES TO HEAVEN & DECLARED, *“MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION.”*

BUT THEN WHEN HE HANDED JESUS BACK TO MARY, HE SAID, *“THIS CHILD IS DESTINED FOR THE FALLING & THE RISING OF MANY IN ISRAEL, AND TO BE A SIGN THAT WILL BE OPPOSED SO THAT THE INNER THOUGHTS OF MANY WILL BE REVEALED – A SWORD WILL PIERCE YOUR OWN SOUL TOO.”*

AND MARY TOOK HER CHILD & LIVED WITH THE MEMORY OF THAT MOMENT & THOSE WORDS.

THE GREAT PREACHER JOHN KILLINGER TELLS ABOUT A TIME WHEN THOSE WORDS WERE DRIVEN INTO HIS SOUL.

HE & HIS FAMILY WERE IN A MUSEUM IN SPAIN, STANDING BEFORE ONE OF THE GREAT SPANISH CRUCIFIXION SCENES.

THE PAINTING WAS DARK & DREARY.

CHRIST WAS HANGING ON THE CROSS.

DOWN IN THE LOWER CORNER OF THE PAINTING, A WOMAN WAS KNEELING.

KILLINGER'S LITTLE SIX-YEAR-OLD SON ASKED, *“WHO'S THAT?”*

“THAT'S MARY, JESUS' MOTHER,” THE BOY'S PARENTS EXPLAINED TO HIM.

HE WAS QUIET FOR A FEW SECONDS & THEN SAID, VERY SOLEMNLY, *“THAT MUST HAVE HURTED HER.”*

KILLINGER SAYS, "SINCE THEN, I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO READ SIMEON'S WORDS TO MARY, 'A SWORD WILL PIERCE THROUGH YOUR OWN SOUL TOO' WITHOUT REMEMBERING THAT OBSERVATION."

AS MARY STOOD AT THE CROSS & WATCHED HER SON DIE – AS SHE SAW HIM PIERCED WITH A SWORD AS HE HUNG THERE – WE CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF SHE WAS THINKING OF THOSE WORDS THAT HAD BEEN SPOKEN TO HER MORE THAN 3 DECADES BEFORE BY SIMEON.

THE CRADLE & THE CROSS CAN NEVER BE SEPARATED.

NOR SHOULD THEY BE.

BECAUSE WITHOUT HIS BIRTH, GOD COULD NEVER HAVE ENTERED THE WORLD AS ONE OF US – ONE WHO CAME TO SAVE US.

AND WITHOUT HIS SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS, HIS BIRTH WOULD HAVE MEANT NOTHING AT ALL.

HE WOULD HAVE BEEN JUST ANOTHER CHILD BORN IN A TINY VILLAGE IN A TIME THAT WOULD MATTER LITTLE TO US TODAY.

WHEN WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX WRITES, "NAILS, SPEAR, SHALL PIERCE HIM THROUGH, THE CROSS BE BORNE FOR ME, FOR YOU..." HE IS REMINDING US THAT, JUST AS JESUS WAS BORN FOR EACH ONE OF US, HE BORE THE CROSS FOR EACH ONE OF US AS WELL.

HE'S REMINDING US THAT THIS IS A TIME OF JOY, BUT IT'S A TIME OF SORROW AS WELL.

ALL TOO MANY OF US KNOW THAT MIXTURE OF JOY & SORROW AT THIS TIME OF YEAR.

THERE IS THE SORROW EXPERIENCED THROUGH LOST INCOME THAT PREVENTS US FROM HAVING THE KIND OF CHRISTMAS TO WHICH WE HAVE GROWN ACCUSTOMED.

THERE'S THE SORROW EXPERIENCED THROUGH BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE THIS SEASON AN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT ONE TO ENDURE.

THERE'S THE SORROW EXPERIENCED AS WE REMEMBER LOVED ONES WHO ARE NO LONGER WITH US TO SHARE IN ALL OF THE TRADITIONS WE HAVE COME TO CHERISH.

IT IS THE END RESULT, THOUGH, THAT MATTERS MOST.

AS WE MOVE THROUGH THE ADVENT SEASON, WE KNOW THE CRADLE WILL BE FOLLOWED BY THE CROSS.

WE KNOW THAT JOY & SORROW ARE INTERMINGLED.

CONSIDER THE ANGUISH EXPERIENCED BY ISAIAH & THE PEOPLE WHEN THAT WHICH THEY THOUGHT WOULD BE CAUSE FOR GREAT CELEBRATION WITH THE BIRTH & LEADERSHIP OF HEZEKIAH TURNED OUT TO BE A TIME OF PAIN & SORROW.

BUT GOD HAD SOMETHING FAR GREATER IN STORE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

WE HAVE THAT ASSURANCE IN OUR OWN LIVES AS WELL.

JOY & SORROW ARE INTERMINGLED BUT SORROW NEVER HAS THE LAST WORD.

MARY'S JOY IN THE BIRTH OF HER SON WAS REPLACED BY THE SORROW SHE EXPERIENCED AS SHE KNELT AT HIS CROSS.

BUT EVEN THEN, GOD HAD SOMETHING GREATER IN STORE FOR HER.

**FOR DEATH ITSELF WAS DEFEATED & THE DEEP SORROW OF GOOD FRIDAY WAS OVERCOME BY THE
GREAT JOY OF EASTER SUNDAY.**

**THE GOOD NEWS – THE BEST NEWS OF THIS SEASON – IS THAT JESUS WAS BORN FOR YOU & HE BORE THE
CROSS FOR YOU AS WELL.**

THERE IS NO BETTER NEWS THAN THAT. AMEN.

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