

December 1 2013

Scripture Lessons *Isaiah 2:1-5*
Romans 13:11-14

Sermon *Come Let Us Walk in the Light*

In 742 BC a young man from Jerusalem, a good man from an influential family responded to God's call to bring a message of hope to an otherwise troubled kingdom called Judah. Syria to the East ruled this comparatively tiny country and in fact extracted tribute from its gross national product in return for Syrian protection; a sort of Mafia protection money of that day. Judah's national morality had become so low that even King Ahaz impressed by the Syrian god, recognized that god as his own. Yahweh, the God of Israel was chosen by Isaiah's people to declare that their God was faithful to God's promises had become for Judah's leader a sort of national guardian. Religion in Judah had become merely civic in nature. The spirit behind the ritual had almost gone. Somehow God's people had drifted from a clear understanding of God covenant relationship with them and consequential national religious and political leaders had endeavored to sort of control their god, so that the god would do their bidding. Now King Ahaz was surrounded by a cabinet of "yes men", prophets and advisors who never dared to disagree with the king. And we can safely assume it was their pride and their need to control even God himself which led the King's prophets to sort of set of the terms of God's covenant relationship with God's people leaning in their favor. So the terms of the covenant were this, in return for meticulous religious practices in the temple, God was to give the nation protection, God was to give the nation blessing. So rather than faithfully witnessing to the gracious and faithful nature of their God and then living out in the way they treated the least and lowly in their society those laws. Judah sort of fell under influence of a theology which had at its central tenet preserving those in the status quo and keeping those in power safe and happy. God who works out the design of history in God's own time was pretty much being forgotten then. Yahweh, the God who was made known to Moses on Sinai knew of that ancient practice of discovery of God's name and through the means using God's name of controlling that God. God was wise of that practice. But Isaiah's God who initiated of God's own free will to be gracious and loving revealed God's name, instead, as a mystery wrapped in a riddle. God, you remember from a burning bush said, "I am who I am." This was the God that was beyond our manipulation; no mere repeating of the words, "Lord, Lord" could control this God. Yahweh, the God of Isaiah establishes a saving relationship on God's own gracious terms and accepts as worship people who are grateful and thankful response for God's goodness in a way that they live their lives. If Isaiah

was convinced in control of the events of the universe and God's purpose was to set up a kingly rule of peace over all the nations of the world. And thus Isaiah wrote of a day when unjust rulers would be replaced by a renewed obedience to God's divine law. In Isaiah's day it was not uncommon for such leaders to take bribes and to be corrupt so rather than winking at all of these things, Isaiah visualized a day of justice; the advent or the coming of people's faithful response to their gracious and all powerful God. Isaiah wrote these words, these familiar words, "He will judge between the nations and would settle disputes with many people." They will beat their swords into plow shears. Isaiah dreamed of the day when people would turn back to God and justice and peace would finally meet together. But in spite of all the difficulties which Isaiah faced in a nation which seemed bent on self destruction; he remained confident in the promises that God had made to David. Now later on in his ministry Isaiah declared a child would be born. A just government would rest on that child's shoulders. He would be an everlasting prince and prince of peace and because of his reign nations would beat their swords into plowshares and the spears into pruning hooks and in the end Isaiah awaited Emmanuel advent; the coming of the Messiah. And the good news is Isaiah's Emmanuel has come as I shared with the boys and girls today. We begin to celebrate the culmination of Isaiah's hope on the first Sunday of Advent not just for his own people but for all the people of the world. We are a people who worship this just and merciful God made known to us in Jesus. We celebrate his advent and we await his advent to come and we like Isaiah still live in the mid of a less than perfect world. A world when the powerful still seek control the God of Jesus, often time completing forgetting the work that God that God sent Jesus into the world to do. But, thankfully, we also live in a world which had the light of Jesus shining the world's darkest places. So in this season there is awfully good news to share. Isaiah expectations has become a reality in spite of an often dark, dangerous and discouraging world and in spite of own short comings as human beings as we worship today and witness to God's faithfulness we think of these words from our last hymn of the day. "Come thou long expected Jesus born to set his people free." During advent then let me encourage you to anticipate, anticipate with joy Jesus' birth. Do this because the infant in the humble manger is the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision. Do this because Yahweh, the God of Isaiah is faithful to God's promises or as Isaiah says at the end of this passage, "Come let us walk in the light for this is the good news" for this is the Gospel according to Isaiah. So thanks be to God for that good news
Together we say; AMEN