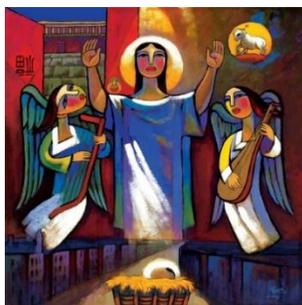


Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood, Dec 18, 2016

Notes for the sermon Is The Power of God With Us (Advent 4 - Love)



Ps 80:1-7 and Matt 1:18-25 Sermon Text = Matt 1:23

***All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken
by the Lord through the prophet:***

***“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”
which means, “God is with us.”***

[Hymns = 160, 161, 168 in the *Book of Praise*]

Key Ideas

1. This idea of God being with us is fascinating – let’s just take a minute to remember the impact of this news on those mentioned in the early chapters of Matthew’s gospel – Mary is with child from the Holy Spirit - Joseph, when he learned that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah, wants to help her avoid public disgrace – the angel explains things and they marry – then Jesus is born – Herod is threatened and frightened – the wise men are curious, confused, delighted with what they find, and generous with their treasures – and all the while, Matthew takes pains to show us that this way of God coming to us was, in fact, anticipated in Israel’s most revered teachings – what I take from these accounts of people encountering God with us is that 1) God does it God’s way, 2) human responses to God’s presence are widely varied, and, in the end, 3) gratitude, loyalty and joy are God’s most desired responses
2. For the original hearers, the invocation of the prophecy from Isaiah would have stirred memories of the Exodus, God’s gift of liberation to Israel to partner with him as blessings for the creation – this liberation is a gift of freedom for creativity, life, and love – frightening responsibilities - when Moses questions his call from God, God simply says, “Don’t be afraid. I will be with you.” – the power of God’s presence, evident most clearly when you are co-creating God’s purpose in and through your life, is sufficient to deal with any fear - there is much in our world to fear, much that is overwhelming when we try to face it along – but that’s the promise that is fulfilled at Christmas – God, at God’s initiative, is with us as our strength and guide – in that presence, we find the grace and the way to overcome those fears and bless the world in the ways God’s intends
3. There is another dimension of this Emmanuel idea that is worth emphasizing as 2016, with all of its stresses, surprises, and strangeness draws to a close – not only is God **with** us, but God is also **for** us - in Germany in the 1930s, when fear and division were taking over the souls of many Germans, one of the most courageous voices of Christian resistance to these developments was Dietrich Bonhoeffer – interesting ideas on the role of music in our Christian faith – in times of care and sorrow, it would keep a keynote of joy alive in you – a crucial part of what God with us and for us meant – and us means all of creation

At this point in our ponderings, then ...

The power of God with us is the power to flourish in the service of God’s purposes for the beloved creation – God takes flesh and dwells among us, full of grace and truth – if you are not attuned to this reason for being, you have cause to fear – if you agree to be drawn into God’s love, you are free to enjoy the power of God with us and for us