

Listen, God is Speaking
Hebrews 1:1-12
Christmas Day 2012

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our new-born Lord and Savior,
Jesus the Christ.

When you think about Christmas, how many of you think of the book of Hebrews? Nobody? That's not surprising. I'll admit that I was kind of surprised when I saw that Hebrews was the source of one of our readings for today – Christmas Day. When we think of Christmas we think about Luke 2 or the other accounts that we find in the Gospels. We may think of Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah or Micah. Sometimes we turn to John 1 and associate it with Christmas because it talks about Jesus taking on flesh and dwelling among us. So we may flip many places in scripture at Christmas time, but Hebrews is not usually at the top of that list.

That's the great thing about our lectionary system. It invites us to explore texts that we wouldn't otherwise think to look at. If it was up to us we would probably read the same three lessons every year at Christmas and listen to them with a sense of nostalgia and longing for the good ole' days when Christmas didn't start in October and people didn't mind if there was a nativity scene set up in front of the local courthouse. But the lectionary is

awesome because it lets us see how Jesus is not only “the reason for the season” as we like to often remind ourselves and others at this time of the year, but he is really the reason for all things. He’s the primary focus of scripture and he’s the solid, unchanging foundation of our lives as Christians.

Have you ever seen a popup book before? The idea is that instead of just a two dimensional picture on a page that you would get when you’re looking at a normal picture book, with a popup book you get 3-D pictures that pop up every time you turn to a new page. Sometimes I think about what the Bible would look like if it were a popup book. Your first thought might be that you would open at the beginning and two trees would pop up with Adam and Eve, then you would flip a few pages and a big boat would pop out with Noah and his family, you may flip and get some pyramids and the people of Israel in Egypt and so on and so forth all the way through scripture.

However, you could imagine it another way and this is how I think about it sometimes. You could imagine that if the Bible were a popup book that every page you opened would have a manger, and a cross and empty tomb that popped up from between the pages. Why a manger and a cross and empty tomb? Because it is all about Jesus. The scriptures that we have leading up to Jesus’ birth that we celebrate today all point towards this

coming Messiah, the savior of the world and the fulfillment of God's promise that was made to Adam and Eve in the garden. The scriptures written after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead all point back to him and his work of salvation.

Our text today helps us see how this works. It starts off by saying "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." For a long time God's people received God's word spoken to them through the prophets that he sent to speak on his behalf. These prophets would bring God's word of promise and other times his word of judgment. The people of Israel knew what God expected of them because the prophets told them.

Once Jesus was born, there was no need for prophets anymore because God was here in the flesh. John the Baptist was the last prophet preparing the way for Jesus to arrive and he even said of Jesus "he must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:30) Jesus was here to speak directly to his people and to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand. He gave this message to his disciples with the instructions to go to all people "teaching them everything that I have commanded" and promising to be with them always "even to the end of the age".

There are times thought that it doesn't seem like he is with us. A little over a week ago now, our country experienced, once again, a tragedy that is hard to come to terms with. 27 people lost their lives in a way that is so violent that we are just stunned. When we are shocked like this we usually start asking questions. What caused the young man to snap and shoot all of these people? Were there any warning signs that he was having trouble? Why did his mother own these kind of guns? What can we do to prevent future acts of violence? One question asked by Christians and non-Christians alike is "Where was God when this tragedy was taking place and why didn't he stop it?"

If you stop to think for a moment, this is an interesting question. What makes it more interesting is that we only seem to ask it during large-scale tragedies. When is the last time you asked yourself "Where was God when I was lying to my boss yesterday? Why didn't he stop me from doing that? Or "Where was God when I yelled at my spouse? Why didn't he stop me from doing that? Or "Where was God when I cheated on my school paper or tax forms?" Why didn't he stop me from doing that?

No we don't expect God to be there to stop us from committing our sins. Especially not those that we enjoy doing and make us feel good. We usually

don't even consider them to be things that would separate us from Him. No, we'd just like to keep them hidden from Him and from everyone else.

It is neat though, because God is in the same place for the people of Newtown, CT, as he is for us and for all people. We see him taking on flesh and dwelling among us as the baby that we celebrate this morning. We see him on the cross suffering violence at the hands of his own people to make the atoning sacrifice for our forgiveness so that we can be killed with him through our baptism and raised to a new life that we live out by loving God and our neighbors. He is present here through His word and physically present with us each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper where we touch and taste his body and blood given for our forgiveness and the strengthening of our faith. He is here every time, without fail

So what are we to do? Listen, God is speaking to you now through his Son. He speaks to you when you hear Pastor say, "As a called and ordained servant of the Word and by the command and in the stead of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins." This isn't the Pastor's forgiveness that he is proclaiming; it is Jesus' forgiveness that he is proclaiming to you.

Listen, God is speaking to you when you hear the scriptures read and the Word proclaimed to you in the sermon each week. God speaks to us through the words that he has already provided to his people as well as through the words that Pastor speaks in the sermon.

Listen, God speaks to you each time we gather around the altar to celebrate the Lord's Supper. When you hear the words "This is my body, given for you" and "This is my blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of you sins" know that this is not the Pastor speaking his own words, but rather Christ speaking through the pastor to give you his life giving body and blood. This body and blood give you both the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of your salvation.

Listen, God is speaking to you in his Word when you use it at home for devotions. It is this word that provides you with the knowledge of the truth and the foundation to withstand every attack that the devil and the world will throw your way.

In the same way that you wouldn't embark on a military mission without a plan, supplies, and support from your fellow squadron members, we cannot live our lives apart from Christ and his church. It is here where we hear God telling us his plan of salvation, it is here where we are refreshed and renewed

and prepared for the battle that we wage against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh and it is here where we receive the support of fellow believers.

The writer of the book of Hebrews leaves us with the reassurance of God's faithfulness in the last verses of our text:

10 And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; **11** they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, **12** like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

That is why we gather here today, to remember the Christ child who was the word by which all things were created, who was born to redeem us all and who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for all eternity.

Amen