

Thank you for joining us for our Advent Midweek Series. In our Lenten Midweek series, we focused on the symbols of the twelve apostles on the north and south sides of our sanctuary and used that as a jumping off point to teach on the apostles. In keeping with the spirit of that series, we will be talking about the four major prophets whose symbols are along the top of our western wall. The four major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. It's not that they're more important than the twelve minor prophets namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, or Malachi. They are called the major prophets because their books are longer.

Our theme verse is also from Hebrews, it is Hebrews 11:16, **“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”** Hebrews 11 is from a chapter of the Bible nicknamed the Hall of Faith wherein the author lists many faithful people from the Old Testament.

The prophets in our series desired a better country, and many of their prophecies speak of a better country. The Lord was preparing for them a city, even as we await the heavenly city of God that is coming down for us at Christ's second return. The Lord is also calling us to live a life of faith that looks ahead to things not yet seen. A singer in one of my favorite Christian bands writes, “You know in your hearts that the farsighted see better things.” By the inspiration of the Spirit, our prophets in our sermon series were indeed farsighted.

Each of the sermons in our series will follow a template of two major parts. I will preach a little on what we know of the prophet himself, explaining the symbol in our church. I will then preach on the text the prophet wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit and explain how it ties into the coming Messiah we await this Christmas.

We will be following the ordering of the books of the Bible which is also the ordering of the stained glass windows from left to right, tonight's prophet is Isaiah. We don't know much about his early life, but we know he preached to the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. We learn of Isaiah especially as he interacts with King Hezekiah, a faithful yet unwise king. The Lord delivers Hezekiah out of several crises using Isaiah as His messenger.

Despite the nation of Assyria attacking Judah, Isaiah advised Hezekiah and the Lord delivered them from Assyria's hand. Isaiah also acted as an intermediary between God and man when Hezekiah was sick to the point of death, Hezekiah prayed for healing and Isaiah pronounced the reversal of the sentence of death. Isaiah also prophesied to Hezekiah of Babylon destroying Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah's sons. In a self-centered response, Hezekiah responded to this as good news as at least he'll remain in peace and safety.

Most remarkable from Isaiah's life is His vision of Yahweh in the temple in Isaiah 6. Isaiah replied, **“And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”** In response, an angel takes a coal from the altar with a pair of tongs, touches it to Isaiah's lips, and his lips are cleansed and his sin atoned for.

The vision continues, **“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’”** Isaiah is raising his hand like an excited school child who knows the answer, but the assignment the Lord gives Isaiah is to preach to a people who don't want to listen or believe, and in his preaching, the people will harden their hearts, close their ears, and shut their eyes. He is to preach until the cities lie desolate and without inhabitant.

If you thought we had a hard time preaching to our community, Isaiah had it harder! His symbol is a saw. Some consider this an oblique reference to Hebrews 11:37, **“They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—”** Rabbinic tradition holds that wicked Manasseh, King of Judah, called Isaiah a heretic for saying he saw the Lord and lived. To punish Isaiah, he sawed him in two.

Isaiah shows us the cost of faithfulness. Many of the people of his time were not faithful to Yahweh their Lord, but no matter the cost, the Lord calls us to follow Him. This faithfulness was not without fruit. Isaiah is sometimes called the Christmas prophet as many of his prophecies foretell of the birth of Christ including the prophecy that He will be born of a virgin.

Our text for tonight does not occur in any of our regular appointed readings in the three-year lectionary that we use. Nonetheless, it too speaks of Christ as we await His coming this Advent Season.

Our text opens with a message of hope: **“Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.”** The season of Advent is all about the journey. It reflects on a people who waited centuries for the coming Messiah who was first promised to them in the Garden of Eden. It is about God's people who were waiting for a better country just as Abraham left Haran to go west to Canaan.

In this season of Advent, we are a people who wait. Yes, we're waiting for Christmas, but we're also waiting for the Lord to be gracious to us and to show us mercy. It might look like the reconciling with an estranged friend or relative. It might look like getting positive test results after a string of health struggles. It

might look like the kicking of a sin habit. Nonetheless, we who wait; wait with hope.

**“For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you.”** Like the father who runs to the aid of a child who fell and skinned His knee, our Heavenly Father doesn’t tarry to come to our aid. **“Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you will glorify me.”**

**“And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.”** We think of Jesus as our Savior. We think of Jesus as our Lord. But do we think of Jesus as our teacher? Maybe not as much. This prophecy speaks of a better teacher, better than the false teachers of Isaiah’s day, even better than Isaiah Himself.

The promise for the people hearing Isaiah’s prophecy is that the better teacher was coming, and that is Jesus Christ Himself. Even from childhood, Jesus wowed the temple teachers with His knowledge and wisdom, and crowds gathered from miles away to listen to His teaching. **“for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”**

In this season of waiting, we do not wait alone. The Bible is one book that as you read it, it reads you. **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** The Bible is not an inert volume of ink on pages, but it is the living Word of God itself, and it is the means by which your Teacher teaches you.

**“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!””** This Advent keep on coming back to church for our midweek services and our Sunday worship. Come to church Sunday morning on the 24<sup>th</sup> *and* Sunday evening for Christmas Eve. Do the same thing on the 31<sup>st</sup> for our Sunday morning and New Years Eve services, respectively. The Word of God will change you. Christ your Better Teacher will speak to you through it to show you the way, even as He guided many throughout His earthly ministry, and in this process, He will smash down your idols.

You know in your heart that the farsighted see better things. Desire a better country, a heavenly one, where Jesus is the teacher, and bold and faithful men like Isaiah echo His teachings.