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Isaiah 22:20-23

“O Come, Emmanuel – Come, O Key of David”

Year B – Advent Midweek 3

December 16, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

After the reigns of both David and Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Now, over time, these weakened kingdoms fell subject to the strong and ruthless Assyrian empire. First, Israel in the north rebelled and was conquered, and its people were taken captive and sent into exile.

Then during the reign of King Hezekiah, who was a good and God-fearing king, the southern kingdom of Judah also resisted Assyria. And threatened with destruction, Judah tried to give in a little bit and pay a tribute of gold and silver to Assyria, but it was not enough. The Assyrian king sent his messengers to Jerusalem to threaten its destruction once again.

The messengers mocked the God of Israel. They boasted that the gods of other nations had not saved those people when the Assyrian destroyed them. And so they ridiculed the people of Judah and said God would not be able to save them either. There would be no escape.

Well, King Hezekiah sent his servants to listen to the Assyrian messengers. And among these servants was a man named Eliakim, the steward of the king’s household, whom we also heard about in our Old Testament Reading. And after hearing the Assyrian threats and their ridicule of Israel’s God, Eliakim and his fellow servants tore their robes in anguish.

And when it came to tell the king about what was said, Eliakim did not sugar-coat the message. He was a faithful messenger. He faithfully reported the threats and mockery to the king. So, Hezekiah sent them to Isaiah the prophet. And that’s when they heard God’s response would be. Isaiah had a message from God for them and for the king.

Isaiah told them that God would save them. That when the time came to fight, God would be the one who would win the victory. And that’s what God did. He sent one angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night. And the Assyrian king, who had once been so boastful and proud, when he woke up the next morning, could only return home in disgrace and defeat.

Now, you might be thinking, this doesn’t seem like much of an Advent or Christmas story. And you’d be right, that is until you hear the prophet Isaiah single out Eliakim as the one who would bear the key of the house of David. He says into the hands of this steward of the king’s household, who had been faithful in the face of the Assyrian enemies, is committed the entire authority of the king himself.

Eliakim, Isaiah says, will have the key to the house of David, the royal house, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah (22:21). He would be the faithful leader of the king’s house, and as the one with this figurative key, his authority would be absolute. When he opens a door, no one will be able to shut it. If he locks a door, no one will be able to open it.

So, what does this mean? Well, Isaiah is doing two things in our Old Testament Reading. First, he is explaining to the people in King Hezekiah’s day how God is still providing for them and saving them by providing them people like Eliakim.

Second, Isaiah is purposefully using these events with Assyria, and he’s painting a picture. The prophet places faithful Eliakim squarely on our Advent road, which leads us to Christmas, because Eliakim in the Old Testament foreshadows another faithful person who was

to come in the New Testament. The one who would also bear the key of the house of the David. The promised descendant of David who would rule for all eternity.

The Word of God through Isaiah would be fulfilled in Jesus, the Child of Bethlehem. And Jesus, like Eliakim, is the faithful steward of the King's household. Jesus says of himself, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me" (John 8:28).

Jesus carried out all the work that his Father sent him to do. And as Eliakim was once forced to listen to the Assyrian officials mock the God of Israel, so Jesus endured the ridicule of his opponents. Religious officials mocked Jesus' claim as the Messiah. Soldiers beat him and crowned him with thorns, making a mockery of his kingship. Even as he hung on the cross, his enemies ridiculed the ability of Israel's God to save: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" (Luke 23:35). It was just like the taunts from the Assyrian messengers outside the walls of Jerusalem.

But even though Jesus' enemies denied the identity and authority of Jesus, Jesus was and is the Christ, the Chosen One of God. And although he did not save himself from the cross, Jesus was still acting with the authority of the key of David to save us. From the cross Jesus destroyed the power of death and the devil, and what's more, he was raised up in victory on the third day.

This was a far greater victory than the victory over 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night. Israel's God demonstrated on a Friday night and on a Sunday morning that he alone has the power to save, and shows us that mighty power in the most unexpected way: in a manger, and on a cross, and in an empty tomb.

There are many days when we may find ourselves like the people of Judah with our enemy encamped all around our city. Not literally, of course, but figuratively. The days when we are called upon to be faithful in the face of our enemies and trust that God will deliver us.

Of course, the problem is we don't always perfectly trust him. We are called to be faithful, but we may at times have our doubts about God's ability to save. Sometimes we forget all that God has done for his people and continues to do for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Even at Christmas, when we remember Christ's birth, we may let our worrisome lives block out the one whose birth we are going to celebrate. We may let our fears and worries overshadow God's victory.

But Jesus, the faithful bearer of the key of the house of David, sees and hears our complaints and all our doubt and all our sin. And he does not respond in kind, but instead chooses to take our sin onto himself and carry it to the cross. And there he suffers and dies for all the sin and doubt and fear that too often mark our lives.

As the apostle Peter writes of Jesus: "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:22-24).

In the book of Revelation, in our Epistle Reading, Jesus is described as Eliakim once was, but in an even greater way. Jesus is the holy one who holds the key of David, "who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens" (3:7). Jesus is the faithful steward, the faithful manager, the faithful messenger of the household of God. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to our crucified and risen Lord.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus has unlocked the kingdom of heaven for us. He is the Door to salvation and he is the Key who has unlocked forgiveness for us. And what's more, he has shared those keys and that authority with his people on earth, with his Church. When you

hear that announcement that your sins are forgiven, it is as sure as if the Key of David himself were speaking, because it *is* Jesus speaking, through his Church on earth.

Very soon we will celebrate the birth of Christ our Savior, who was faithful in all things to his heavenly Father, just as Eliakim was faithful in his service to the king of Judah. And at Christmas we will celebrate the good news that in those tiny hands of the infant in Bethlehem's manger is the key that unlocks the forgiveness of our sin and opens the door to our eternal life. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**

(This sermon adapted from the *Creative Communications* materials for the series, *O Come, Emmanuel*, 2020.)