

Pastor Joe Polzin  
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16  
“God’s Ways”  
Year B – Fourth Sunday in Advent  
December 20, 2020

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

It’s through the prophet Isaiah that God declares, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... For as the heavens are higher than earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). God’s ways are not our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

It’s a truth, I think, Christians are willing to admit and obviously we know. After all, we recognize that we are not God and couldn’t possibly compare our ways or thoughts to his. *And yet*, when we come to a moment in our lives when we find that this is true, it tends to be a strange, or confusing, or maybe even a terrible moment.

King David had one of these moments. He had just entered a season of peace, as the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies. The Ark of the Covenant, the place where God made his presence known, had just been brought to Jerusalem. And David now had the time and the opportunity to perceive what he deemed was a serious problem.

Here David sat in his own royal palace, and there was the ark of God housed in the temporary structure of the tabernacle—the tent of dwelling that had traveled with Moses and the Israelites in all their wandering in the wilderness, and had also lasted through all the days of the judges.

So, David goes to Nathan, the prophet, and tells him of his plan to do something in return for all the Lord had done for him. He wants to build a temple in the Lord’s honor. And Nathan agrees, telling him, “Go, do all that is in your heart” (1 Sam. 7:3). Not even Nathan could see yet what the Lord was intending to do.

That is, until the Word of the Lord came to Nathan that night. God instructs Nathan to tell David of his higher ways and his higher thoughts. God tells him that he has not lived in a house since Israel came out of Egypt. Throughout all the days of the wandering and the days of all the judges ruling over Israel, God never once asked why someone hadn’t built a house for him.

God then reminds David of all that he had done for him, that he had taken this shepherd-boy and made him king over Israel. God had been with David and had given him rest from his enemies. Furthermore, David was going to continue to be blessed by God as he would have a name and a reputation as great as any on earth. And the people of Israel would be given a place of security where they may be planted.

You see, God is turning the tables on David. Though David’s noble intent was to bless the Lord, God reminds him that, in all things, it is ultimately we who are blessed by God. God’s ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts.

But the greatest blessing is the one God saves for last. Not only has God seen David through his entire life, but in the moment that David wanted to make a house for God, God instead promises to make a house for David (7:11). God says, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (7:16).

And if you read on just a few more verses, you see David’s response to all that God promises. “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?”

And yet this was a small thing in your eyes” (7:18-19). David is astounded, and rejoices that God’s ways are *not* his ways, and his thoughts are *higher* than his thoughts.

Of course, there are some important truths one must recognize here. The fact that God’s ways are not our ways means that God will have his way. When it comes to our lives, only one way will happen. And it’s God’s. And the other truth about this is that God’s way will happen, even when his way seems strange, or confusing, or even terrible.

As an example, let me remind you of the rest of the story of David’s house. David’s son was going to be the one permitted to build the temple for God. But King Solomon was the *second* son born to David’s wife, Bathsheba. If you recall, David chose to take Bathsheba, who was another man’s wife at the time, in a brazen act of adultery and impregnate her with an illegitimate child. And so, David had her husband murdered in order to cover his tracks.

And if Martin Luther is right in talking about this situation, and I believe he is, David had rejected the Holy Spirit from his heart, and stood in condemnation for his sin. That is, until the prophet Nathan comes to David and buries the sword of the Spirit into David’s heart. But that first child would still die because of his father’s sin.

But despite David’s evil, he was still given Solomon. And Solomon became king, and he built the temple for God. But what then becomes of David’s house? Well, Solomon falls into gross idolatry, and subsequent kings from David’s line would be arrogant. They would continue to commit grievous sins against the Lord.

The kingdom was divided. Jerusalem was destroyed. And the people of Israel were carried off into exile. And from our perspective, the glory of the house of David seems to disappear entirely. God’s ways are certainly not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. They are high, and strange, and confusing, and even terrible.

David’s line disappeared. But as foretold, a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse, (Isaiah 11:1), from the house of David. And, as we heard in our Gospel reading, one day an angel speaks to a virgin in Nazareth, and says, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

At last, the true king of David’s royal line, the son of David as he is so often called, finally arrives. And he is called that because it’s crucial to realize that, in Jesus, the promise given to David way back in 2 Samuel chapter 7 is fulfilled. That, through Jesus, David’s throne is established forever.

But who ends up calling Jesus king? Well, he is called king by the poor, the sick, the lame, the foreigner, the widows, the orphans. But those who claim to be looking for the heir to David’s throne, the religious leaders of the day, will plot, hate, betray, and arrest Jesus, and hand him over to be beaten and crucified in shame, nakedness, and rejection for all the world to see. There on the cross, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews.

And there in the tomb with the Son of David, the forever king, was buried all of David’s plans and all his sinful ways, as well as all the plans of all mankind and all our sinful ways. And we can once again only confess that God’s ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

But that wasn’t the end. Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God, where he rules now, and from where he will come again. His kingdom *has* been made sure forever. The promise to David was kept. *David’s* plan never happened, but *God’s* plan happened

in ways that David or we could never imagine. And it's best that way. In fact, it's the only way. Even when God's way *seems* strange, or confusing, or even terrible.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is all still true. It is still remarkably true in our lives. We, too, are children of God, desiring to do great things for God like David was. We want to be godly people living in godly ways, for our families and for each other. And here, too, at church, we want to be God-pleasing people and do the work of the ministry God has called us to do here in our community, so that we may make a difference for his kingdom.

And so, in our lives, and in our church, and in our families, we all have desires, and plans, and ways that we'd like things to go. Ways we'd like our lives to play out. And we only hope that God agrees.

But we don't actually know. God does, but we don't. Therefore, we must learn, as difficult as it is at times, to recognize that God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Especially when his ways and his thoughts seem strange, and confusing, and even terrible. We can even seek to learn how to be content, and what's more, to give thanks in such times. To be able to say with David, "Who am I, O Lord God, that you have brought me thus far?"

In less than a couple of weeks, the year 2020 will end. And in a couple more months, we'll begin reaching one-year milestones of all the things that have drastically changed in our world and in our lives over the past year. And this will bring a lot of things into focus as we reflect on all that has happened. You only need to look around you right now to begin to see just how drastic some of those changes have been.

Could any of us say that we would have planned things to happen the way they did? For the people of this world to live in the fear that seems to have captured them? For our churches to be nearly empty? For our families to be smaller? For our friends to be fewer? For all the things in this life that cause us pain, or hardship, or sorrow?

And yet, when we look to God and all that he has done for his people throughout history, and especially all that he has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ, we are able to approach each day with faith and trust. We are able to respond to God in contentment and thanksgiving. We are able to respond as David once did when he said, "Who am I, O Lord God, that you have brought me thus far?"

Or we may even respond like the virgin Mary, who after being told that a difficult and, frankly, an impossible thing was going to happen, that she was going to be the mother of the Most High God, and she simply responded, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

In just a few days, we will welcome and celebrate our Lord at his birth. Let us take the time to remember that he came in a way that no one anticipated. He came to do things that no one could understand. He continues to work in unexpected and higher ways as he rules from heaven. And one day he will come again in all his glory to establish his kingdom forever.

And we are simply caught up in his greater plan, as we look forward to the day of the new heavens and the new earth, the place of our safety, the place we will be planted by the Lord forever. The day when we might catch simply a glimpse of the true breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's eternal love for us.

Until that day, we don't know what God will do in our lives. I don't know what's in store for me the rest of the day. Now, I have a thought and a plan, but I don't really know. And none of us do. Except for God. But that's the way it's supposed to be. We are simply caught up in his greater plan, all his thoughts and all his ways. And we trust that his grace and his love for us in

Jesus Christ is sufficient for the day at hand. That we can be content, and at peace, and give thanks that God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. 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.**

(Parts of this sermon adapted from Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, Concordia Seminary chapel, St. Louis, Dec. 9, 2011.)