

Pastor Joe Polzin
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
“God’s Way”
Year B – Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 24, 2017

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

It is 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 [higher] than your thoughts” (55:8-9). God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.

It’s a truth, I think, we’re all willing to admit, and obviously 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 surprising. And even, as we’ll talk about, perhaps even strange and unsettling.

David had one of these moments. He had just entered a season of peace, as the Lord had given him rest of all his surrounding enemies. The Ark of the Covenant, the place where God makes 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 traveling in the wilderness, as well as lasted throughout 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.” 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 tells David, through Nathan, of His higher ways and His higher thoughts. He tells him that He has not lived in a house since Israel came out of Egypt. Through the days of the wandering, and through 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 now given him rest from all his enemies. Furthermore, David will continue to be blessed by God, as he will have a name and a reputation as great as any on earth. And the people of Israel will have 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 David that in all things, it is ultimately he that is blessed by God. God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And the greatest blessing God saves for the end. Not only had God seen David through his life up to this point, but in the moment that David wanted to make a house for God, God promises to make a house for David (v. 11), and that David’s “house and [his] kingdom shall be made sure forever before [him]. [His] throne shall be established forever” (v. 16).

And if you read on just a few 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” (vv. 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 truths we 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. God’s. And the other truth about this is that God’s way *will* happen, even when His way seems strange, unsettling, confusing, or even terrible to us.

Let me remind you of the story of David’s house. David’s son would be the one permitted to build the temple for God. But Solomon was the *second* son born to David’s wife, Bathsheba. If you recall, David chose to take another man’s wife in brazen adultery, and impregnate her with an illegitimate child, and he had her husband murdered in order to cover his tracks. And if Martin Luther is right in talking about this, David rejected the Holy Spirit from his heart, and stood in condemnation for his sin. That is, until Nathan comes to David, and buries the sword of the Spirit into David’s heart. And that first child would die.

But despite David’s evil, there was Solomon. And he became king, and he built the temple. But what of David’s house? Solomon fell into gross idolatry, and subsequent kings would be arrogant, they would continue to commit grievous sins against the Lord. The kingdom would be divided. Jerusalem would be destroyed. And the people of Israel would be carried into exile. And the glory of the house of David seemed to disappear entirely. God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. They are high, and strange, and even difficult.

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. And he is called that because it was crucial to realize that in Jesus, the promise given to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7 is fulfilled, and that his throne will be established forever.

But who will call Jesus king? He will be 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 will plot, hate, betray, and arrest him, 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 Jesus, the Son of David, is 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. God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

Jesus *was* raised from the dead. And exalted to the right hand of God, where he rules, and from where he will come again. His kingdom *has* been made sure forever. And until then, he *is* always with us. The promise to David was kept. David’s plan never happened. God’s plan happened in ways that David could never imagine. It’s best that way. It is the only way. God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And friends, this is still true. It is still remarkably true in our lives. We, too, are children of God, desiring to do great things for God. We want to be Godly people living in Godly ways, for our families and for each other. And here too at our church, we want to be God-pleasing people, and do the work of ministry that God has called us to do here in our community, in order

to make a difference for His kingdom. And so, in our lives, and in our church, we have desires, and plans, and ways that we'd like things to go. Ways we'd like our lives to play out. And we hope that God agrees.

But we don't actually know. God does, but we don't. Therefore, we must learn to stay open to Him. We must learn 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 rejoice in such times, and be able to say with David, "Who am I, O Lord God?"

When I was growing up in the northern suburbs of Cincinnati, in April of 1999, there was a terrible outbreak of tornados across the South and Midwest. The worst one came in the early moments of daybreak only a couple miles from where I lived. It was an F4 tornado that cut a quarter-mile wide swath for over 10 miles. Nearly 800 homes were damaged or destroyed, over 80 businesses. Millions of dollars of damage. My school was wiped out, and they met in another's school gym for the remainder of the school year. And four people died. Two of them, a husband and wife, Jacque and Lee Cook, were in their own home at the time.

Their son, Ryan, was a freshman at the University of Dayton. And a few days after the tragedy, he sat down for an interview with a local news reporter. And I'll never forget what he said. He was a Christian, and the reporter asked, "Ryan, do you ever ask God, 'Why me?'" To which, this 18 year old man said, "No, I only ask, 'Why *not* me?'" And then he went on to explain that because of his faith, his trust was ultimately in the Lord. He was just thankful that this hadn't happened to someone who didn't have faith in Jesus.

Here was a young man who knew that God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And this mindset we are called to have is a humble one. And when we realize the way in which God works is beyond anything we are able to comprehend, we are enabled in faith to respond like Ryan did, to respond in the words of David, "Who am I, O Lord God?" Or may we even respond like the virgin Mary, who after being told that an impossible thing will happen, after being told that she will be the mother of the Most High God, she responded and said, "Let it be to me according to *your* word" (Luke 1:38).

Tonight, we will welcome and celebrate our Lord at his birth. Let us remember that he came in a way that no one anticipated. He came to do things that we could not 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 will simply be caught up in his greater plan, as we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, the place of our safety forever. Perhaps even then, we will be unable to fully comprehend and the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love for us, unable to understand the way in which God works to secure for us our peace. Perhaps all we will be able to say will be, "Who am I?"

Until then, 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. I have a thought and a plan. But I don't really know. And no one does. Except for God. And that's the way it's supposed to be. We are just caught up in His greater plan, His greater way. And we trust that His grace and His love for us in Jesus Christ is sufficient, and we rejoice that His 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.