

GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP, IS YOURS? – ISAIAH 7:10-14

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Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.” Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I've heard of this game for as long as I can remember. I used to play this when I was growing up with my sisters, with my friends. I even remember playing this game in high school and college. This game was a very good teaching tool for trust. You've probably heard of it too. I'm not even sure this "game" has a name. But this is how it goes. One person turns their back on another and leans back. The person behind then catches the person who is falling. I thought I would have all of you get up, find a partner and try that, but then I thought you would have too much fun, so we couldn't do that, since Lutherans can't show emotion in a worship service.

Anyway, what often happens in that little game? More often than not, the person who is falling backwards will instinctively react – they put their foot behind to stop their fall, or they jackknife to cushion the potential fall with their butt instead of their back. Now maybe it's just a reflex action, but it can also show a lack of trust in the person who promised to catch them. That game really reveals how difficult it can be to trust another person, not only in the game, but also in life. It can be hard to trust certain people with certain tasks, because they won't do it my way.

And now translate that into the spiritual/religious realm for a minute. How do you react when it comes to trusting God? It may seem like a silly question, but is it really? Just like you can say you trust the person to catch you when you're falling, by your actions you can prove otherwise. So also with God. You can say that you trust God in the safe confines of the church, but how often do you let God catch you when you lean back, or do you jackknife or catch your own fall?

In our fourth and final Sunday in Advent, we see Isaiah address this issue head on with King Ahaz, a king of the nation of Judah. Isaiah was asking Ahaz to lean back and trust God that everything would be OK. And yet Ahaz kept jackknifing. Eventually, Isaiah had to let Ahaz in on a little secret, a secret that is good for us to look at too. GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. Our lack of trust doesn't change God's promise to catch us. He's back there promising to catch us whether we lean back in faith or not. And GOD'S MIND WAS MADE UP when he promised to send a Savior. GOD'S MIND WAS MADE UP when he sent Immanuel – God with us. GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP, IS YOURS?

This is our fourth Sunday we have reached back into the book Isaiah to look at the different prophecies he has concerning Christmas. Of all the prophecies Isaiah has in his book, this has got to be one of the most obvious connections to Christmas. But this prophecy was not spoken in a vacuum, it actually has a good story that goes along with it.

Once again we go back in time to when the nation of Israel was split in two – Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Isaiah was speaking with the current king of Judah – Ahaz, a wicked king in the eyes of the Lord and he proves it yet again in our 1st lesson for this morning. Ahaz was afraid because the northern nation of Israel allied itself with a neighboring country against Judah, essentially boxing Judah in. Ahaz, instead of leaning back on the Lord for help, turned to the king of Assyria. But despite all of Ahaz's wicked deeds spiritually, God still promised to save him, still promised to catch him if he leaned back.

Humanly speaking, Ahaz had every right to be afraid, but divinely speaking he did not. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, offered Ahaz an amazing opportunity to confirm his promise. **“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths, or in the highest heights.”** Only a few times in Scripture does the Lord give someone permission to ask for anything in confirmation of his love. And here Ahaz has this awesome opportunity, and because of his own sinful volition, he squanders it. **“Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.’”** In his sinful rebellion against God, he cites his respect for God as a reason not to ask him.

The word hypocrite comes to mind, and Martin Luther had a good way to describe these people, *“where it is not necessary they're pious, when they should be humble, they're proud. When God gives a command to take a risk, one must take a risk, for to obey the word is not to tempt God.”* Ahaz was not afraid of putting the Lord God to the test, he was afraid of listening to God. If he listened to God, then he would have to back out of his treaty with the Assyrians. If he listened to God, then he would have to admit that all this time he had been wrong.

Ahaz viewed this as a legitimate choice that he had. A choice to take God's help or leave it. And in a way he did have this choice. But his choice had no effect on what God was going to do, whether Ahaz asked for a sign or not, GOD HAD HIS MIND MADE UP. God was behind Ahaz, waiting for him to lean back and trust in him. Ahaz's flaw was thinking by not leaning back on God he was OK. But he wasn't. To explain, let me use another example.

Do you remember Indiana Jones' quest for the holy grail movie? Toward the end of the movie, Indy is hanging over a ledge with the holy grail just outside his grasp. His father is above, begging Indy to take his hand so that he might be pulled to safety. Does Indiana Jones have choices? Certainly, he can choose to take his father's hand and be saved, or he can choose to reach for the holy grail and almost certainly fall to his death. Ahaz found himself in a similar spiritual situation. God isn't the one benefiting most from having Ahaz trust him, Ahaz would be.

Yet, it is not just Ahaz, who was in a precarious spiritual situation. It was all of us. God isn't the one benefiting most from having us trust him, we are. All of us hanging over that ledge of sin, with a seemingly valuable treasure just outside our reach. God is calling for us to trust him, to allow him to pull

us to safety, and how often have we continued to reach for that seemingly valuable treasure. How often have we continued doing what we want to do, just because it felt so good? How often have we put the Lord to the test, when we think that we can handle our own problems, feigning piety by saying we don't want to "bug" God?

But that's not even the worst of it. The worst of it isn't that we so often have our mind made up against God, it's that we always had our mind made up against God. We were born with our mind made up against God, we were born in imperfection, and we were born with an innate desire to not trust God. Which is why we can be glad GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP.

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GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. He made up his mind to save people who couldn't save themselves. Take a look back at the story of Isaiah and Ahaz. God told Ahaz to ask for any sign to confirm his promise to him. But Ahaz would not. And so Isaiah responds, telling Ahaz that GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. Listen to his words again, **"Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."**

GOD'S MIND WAS MADE UP, he was giving Ahaz a sign, he was giving us a sign. A sign that he would watch over the nation of Judah, a sign that he would come to save us. A sign that would give visible proof of his love. Let's take a look at this sign. In some miraculous way, God put in the mind of Isaiah the picture of the virgin Mary, who, though she had not slept with a man, would give birth to a child. And not just any child, a son, and his name would be Immanuel. That name means 'God with us.' This is how GOD'S MIND WAS MADE UP.

Because we had our mind made up against God, God made up his mind to save us despite our resistance. And the only way that would happen would be to break the cycle of sin the world has been trapped in since the beginning. This son born of a virgin would break that cycle of sin, break the cycle of self-reliance and false-piety. He grabs onto us when we were falling down the pit to hell and pulls you up. GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP, IS YOURS?

This son born of a virgin would come 700 years after Isaiah had made this prophecy, this son born of a virgin came 2,000 years ago at Christmas. And it is a visible sign of God's love. A visible sign that he was born to save you. And what does that mean to you today? Christmas is only three days away, the excitement is building – you can't wait to see family, you wonder what you might get for Christmas, you can't wait for the look on the kid's faces when they open their presents. These are all visible signs of peoples' love. And there's nothing wrong with getting excited about these things. But I hope you also get excited about the significance of the son born of a virgin.

Its significance shows that GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. He made up his mind to save you, whether you believe it or not (although you would be kind of foolish to not believe it). And it is not just that God made up his mind 2,000 years ago to send his Son and now says, "Believe it or else." He continues to give us visible reminders of his love today. He reminds us of his love with his Word – the Bible. The Bible shows us GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP – it shows us the sin he hates, and the grace he gives. He gives a visible reminder of his love in the sacraments – Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In those two sacraments,

God combines his love with ordinary things like water, bread and wine and makes something extraordinary. Every time you witness a baptism, every time you partake in the Lord's Supper, you are partaking in a sign of God's visible love for you.

Fellow Christians, GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. He made up his mind to send a Son to save you. He made up his mind to call you one of his children. He made up his mind to give you his Word as a guide to follow. He made up his mind to show his love to you time and time again. GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. He stands behind you and asks you to fall into his loving arms. GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP, IS YOURS? Amen.