

Coming Up—The Presence of God—Coming Down

1st Sunday in Advent; Series A

Isaiah 2:1-5

One of the things I really enjoy about the location of Atonement Lutheran Church is the view. It is great to have a Church located on a hill. Regardless of what we might think about the location, Jesus' words are relevant, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14). In addition, the location of Atonement can be nice especially on a warm day since you can catch a breeze coming up the hill from Sweetwater Springs Blvd. In fact, I have spoken with many people from the community who enjoy coming up here to take a lunch break and relax. One of the other things I enjoy about the location of Atonement Lutheran Church is the view of Mount Helix.

At 1365 feet Mt. Helix is one of the taller peaks in this area. Unlike most of the other peaks it is unique in that it has a park at the top along with a naturally landscaped amphitheater. Along with these features, what sets Mt. Helix apart from many of the other peaks in San Diego is, of course, the cross at the top. At the top of one of the tallest peaks in this immediate area is a symbol of the presence and love of God not just for the citizens of East County, but for the whole world.

Today is the first Sunday in the Season of Advent, the beginning of a new Church Year. The Church Year calendar is centered in God's presence and his love for the whole world. During the Season of Advent we especially remember that God is present in and for the world he created. The word "advent" is Latin and means "to come." In the Season of Advent we remember that God so loved the world he created that *he came* to it, *still comes* to it, and *will come again* to fully complete what he started in the person and work of Christ here on earth.

In the Old Testament reading Isaiah gave us a picture of God's presence, love, and devotion not just for his people Israel, but for all nations. He used the image of a tall mountain. The prophet described a mountain of the house of the Lord that is the highest of the mountains, lifted up above the hills (Is 2:2). It is "the mountain of the house of the Lord," meaning that it is the place where God comes to dwell and make his presence known.

In the Old Testament the Lord made his presence known most definitely through the tabernacle that was built at the foot of Mt. Sinai after the time of the Exodus. God's glory came down and rested upon the tabernacle in the form of a cloud (Ex 40:34-38). Later on during the time of the Israelite Monarchy, the tabernacle rested within the Walls of the Temple. The area of the tabernacle had a room called the "Holy of Holies" and inside the "Holy of Holies" was located the Ark of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments. The whole structure of the Temple was located on a hill, in the City of Jerusalem. The place where the presence of God came to dwell with his people and where the Ten Commandments were housed during the time of the Old Testament was Jerusalem, also known as Mount Zion—the House of the Lord as Isaiah proclaims it. It is no coincidence that we find Jesus parading into this high, holy city in our Gospel reading. He is the presence of God coming for his people.

Isaiah used this image of a tall mountain to give us a picture of God bringing his presence, love, and devotion for the world. Yet, this mountain is not without company. Like Mt. Helix, the nations surround this mountain and are drawn to

the top of it. As Isaiah unfolds this picture for us, we begin to see tribes and peoples from all nations flowing up this mountain like rivers flowing backwards in a great confluence. The many rivers of nations will now have their source and beginning at the top of this mountain where God dwells and where his Will and ways are revealed. Where there was once a confusion of nations with a variety of conflicting ideas, ways, and attitudes, in Isaiah's picture, God comes to dwell, to make his presence known and to bring unity and peace.

When God comes to dwell on earth he comes to bring unity and peace in a world of confusion. Isaiah shows us the highest mountain where God teaches us his ways and reveals his Will. But the reality is that the world in Isaiah's day and the world in our day is a world of conflicting ways and a struggle of various willpowers. We look around and see disorder. We live in a world where God's authority is thrust aside and people choose instead to assert their feelings and opinions as authoritative. We may decide that the majority vote will guide our decisions about morality and what is right and wrong. The resulting picture is one of confusion. As the writer of the Book of Judges describes the state of things at that time, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). In subtle ways we may find ourselves adding to the confusion when we as Christians decide that God's Word is only authoritative for certain parts of our lives and not others. We live in contradicting ways that confuse others around us. Yet, in this world of confusion and contradictions God comes to dwell in order to bring his peace and unity. God comes "to bring Christ to the nations so that the nations can be brought to the Church" (See Lutheran Hour Ministries Mission Statement).

Every Easter Sunday many in the surrounding area are drawn to the top of Mt. Helix to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. People come to the base of that cross to celebrate God's redeeming and victorious presence, love, and devotion for the world. When God comes to this world to dwell in Christ he gathers his people through the cross and the resurrection. Isaiah says that that nations and peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (Is 2:3). In Christ's advent he comes in midst of confusion. In Christ's death and resurrection he lifts people out of confusion and consequence of it, death itself, through his death and resurrection on a mountain—Mount Calvary.

Isaiah speaks of nations "flowing" to the Mountain like rivers converging. Through Baptism all nations can flow to the presence of God through participation in his death and resurrection. You are raised from the confusion of Sin and death and placed on the mountain, in the house of the Lord. And the response is one of gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving.

When a congregation of people *flow* to the top of Mt. Helix at the base of the cross to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, I am sure that you can hear the song of celebration *flowing* down the mountain. The message of peace and victory through Jesus' cross and resurrection comes down upon a people, *flowing down*, upon many who undoubtedly still living amid confusion and contradictions. This message of peace coming down and *flowing through the world* is how Isaiah ends his prophetic image that we heard with our ears and saw with our mind's eye this morning. He ends with peace for all the nations. God brings this peace now in Christ—in the midst of confusion. A cross on Mt. Helix and an Easter service on the top at the base of that cross is a reminder. We also bring that "good news to the nations even as we bring the nations to the Church." God's picture of peace is not fully complete this side of Christ's second advent. Only at that time will his picture be fully revealed. Until then, let us walk in the Lord and dwell in his house,

proclaiming his ways and walking in his paths even as we walk throughout our lives and dwell in our houses. At Atonement Lutheran we even have an advantage—we are already on a hill! Amen.