

**Is there any Hope?**  
**December 18, 2023**

On December 17th 1927... **[1 USS S-4]**  
95 years ago... today...  
The USS S-4 submarine...  
Surfaced after being submerged...  
Off the coast of Provincetown Massachusetts...

But when the boat broke the surface...  
It was accidentally rammed...  
And sunk...  
By a US Coast Guard destroyer.

When the destroyer stopped...  
And lowered it's lifeboats...  
It only found a small amount of oil...  
And bubbles rising to the surface.

A rescue operation was begun...  
To save six men... who were trapped...  
In the forward torpedo room.  
But the rescue effort was made difficult...  
By extreme bad weather.

One diver placed his ear...  
To the side of the vessel and listened.  
He heard tapping...  
And understood it was Morse code.

The question that the trapped men asked...  
Pulled at the hearts...  
Of all the people involved in the rescue... they asked...  
Is there any hope? **[2 Any Hope]**

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And even though...  
That's an extreme example...  
The question is basic...  
To our entire human experience.

When we see a world at war.  
In the defiance of all logic...  
And goodness...

When we see drug problems...  
And homelessness...  
And severe mental illness.  
Continuing to tendril it's way...  
Through our families and friends.

When we see political parties...  
More interested in election results...  
And securing their political position and power...

While being completely...  
Ineffective and unwilling to compromise.  
To work together to make this country...  
A better place.

When we see greed triumph... over compassion.  
Again... and again... and again...

When the heroes of our culture...  
Are those possessed by fame, prestige, and power...

Instead of people who really care... about us...  
People of character...  
Grandpas and grandmas...  
Teachers and friends.  
People who have actually earned our respect...  
By their actions.

When we see this kind of swirling nonsense...  
Around us all the time...

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Sometimes WE feel trapped...  
Like men in a submarine...  
Like it's getting harder and harder to breathe.  
And there is nothing we can do.  
We have no power...  
To fix what is wrong.  
To fix what's happening TO US.  
Happening around us...

And it makes us ask...  
Is there any hope?

Because truth be told...  
We need hope to survive...  
We desperately need hope...  
It is basic to who we are...

We need hope...  
As much as we need food...  
And water...  
And shelter.

Without hope...  
We lose heart...  
We erode from the inside out...  
We stop dreaming of a future...

And we begin to see life...  
Not as something good and glorious...  
Given to us by God.

But as a burden.

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So in tonight's lesson...  
From the gospel of St. Matthew...  
Chapter 1...

We have a word...  
That you know...  
Because you have heard it...  
Your whole life...  
Every year around Christmas time...  
We boldly proclaim the word... **[3 Emmanuel]**  
Emmanuel.

And the gospel lesson itself tells us...  
What Emmanuel means...  
God with us.

But it doesn't really explain...  
Why we use the word...  
Or the origin the word.

Or where this idea...  
This theological concept...  
Of God with us...  
Come from?

Lets have a quiz tonight... shall we?  
Of course we should!  
Let me ask you...

How many times...  
Does the word Immanuel...  
Show up in the Bible.

Take a guess.  
Well... it's interesting...  
It appears **ONLY** four times...

In the entire Word of God...  
Three times... in the book of Isaiah...  
And one time... in the gospel of Matthew.

So Isaiah... **[4 Isaiah]**  
Was the first one...  
To coin... and use the word...  
Immanuel.

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And the context...  
Is kind of interesting...  
It's what the women's bible study...  
Have been studying...  
For a year and a half now...  
And yes... we have about...

Another year and a half to go!  
The book of Isaiah!  
And what that book teaches us...  
The primary lesson is...  
Nothing ever changes...  
The way the world was... back then...  
Is the way the world is... today...  
Not much different.

Sure we have running water... indoor plumbing...  
And electricity...

But the things the people of Judah...  
Struggled with...  
Worried about...  
And fought against...  
Are the exact same things...  
We experience today.

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Here's what happened.  
Back in Isaiah's time...

The Kingdom of Israel... **[5 Map]**  
Was broken into two parts.  
A divided Kingdom... if you will.

There was the Northern Kingdom...  
Which had 10 of the tribes of Israel...  
So the bigger part... was to the north.  
They were bigger...  
So they got to keep...  
The name... Israel.

Then there was this Southern Kingdom...  
Significantly smaller.  
Basically 2 1/2 tribes...  
It had the tribe of Benjamin...  
It had the tribe of Levi...  
Which was the priestly branch...  
In charge of the worship in Jerusalem...

And then Judah.  
Judah was the biggest tribe in the South...  
So they became known collectively... as Judah.

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Anyway... Israel made a deal with Syria...  
A larger... more powerful kingdom to the north.  
They paid them... for protection...  
Israel trusted Syria to keep them safe...  
Against the big nations to the northeast...  
Especially Assyria.

Which at this time...  
Was gaining more and more power.  
But here's the rub...  
Israel wanted Judah...  
To join with them and Syria...  
Make an alliance...  
Against Assyria...  
And Judah refused.

Which made Israel...  
Go to war against Judah...  
Their own people.  
It was ridiculous.  
It was wrong.  
It was evil.

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Anyway... Israel trusted the Syrians...  
More than they trusted God.

Well... guess what...  
It didn't work!  
Israel and Syria were defeated...

Assyria swept through that whole area...  
In the year 721 bc...  
Israel was destroyed...  
And the people were dispersed...  
Taken from their homes...  
Scattered to other lands...  
And Israel was done.

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So Judah... witnessed all this...  
This whole political mess...

At that time...  
God sent a prophet named Isaiah...  
To help Ahaz... the King of Judah...  
Reconsider his political alliances...  
And to put his trust...  
In God... instead of the nations of the world...

And of course...  
Ahaz... and the people...  
Thought it sounded ok...  
But wanted some kind of proof...  
That God was really with them...  
And God would really protect them...

So Isaiah said... to King Ahaz...  
Well... go ahead...  
Ask a sign of the Lord your God;  
Let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

But King Ahaz... in false humility said... I will not ask,

And I will not put the Lord to the test.

Then Isaiah said... seriously...  
Hear then, O house of David!  
Is it too little for you to weary mortals  
That now... you weary my God also? **[6 Isaiah 7.14]**

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.  
Look, the young woman is with child  
And shall bear a son  
And shall name him Immanuel.

There it is.  
Immanuel.

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In other words...  
Even though this destructive world power...  
Is moving right into your back yard...

And even though you are shaking in your boots...

And you can't think of any human recourse...  
To resolve your problem.  
Because there is NO human recourse...  
To resolve your problem.

Even though your entire world...  
Is in complete chaos.

There is hope.  
There will be a child.  
Named Immanuel.  
Which means... God with us.

In other words...  
In this terribly dark moment...  
You are not alone.  
God is with you.

So ask... ask God...  
Is there any hope...  
And Isaiah says...  
On behalf of our God.

Yes. There is hope.  
God is with you.

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Because you know... **[7 Hope]**  
When life is good...  
And we're cruising along...  
Not a worry in our hearts...

Then honestly... there isn't much need for hope.  
We don't think about what we need...  
During the good times.  
But during those hard times...  
Hope is what we hold onto...  
To make it... through this day...  
To the next.

I know I've told you this story before...  
But when my life was complete chaos...  
When I was going through a divorce...  
And my ex-wife was being more than difficult...

And of course...  
I was sad... and disappointed in myself.  
I felt like I had failed miserably...  
And I was having a hard time...  
Putting one foot in front of the other.

At that time... **[7a Keypad]**  
I changed my garage door code.  
On the keypad... outside the garage...  
I changed it to... 4-6-7-3.  
Which corresponded to the letters... H-O-P-E.

Because in that moment...  
I desperately needed to know...  
There was hope.  
That God was with me.  
That Immanuel was a real thing.

That in the pit of despair...  
And messiness of life...  
And all the crud...

That Jesus was with me.  
To give me strength.  
To help me new life.  
To give me hope.

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Have you ever noticed...  
That we are stronger... BRAVER...  
Feel more confident...  
When we have someone with us...  
When we have to do something...  
Scary or hard or sad.

It's just the way it is. **[8 Roller Coaster]**

Have you ever ridden a roller coaster...  
By yourself?  
It's no fun.

You hold on tight.  
You clench your fists...  
Make an ugly tight face...  
And you just want to get through it.  
But you have no one...  
To share the temporary terror...

But when a daughter is with you...  
Then it's fun... and funny...  
To watch her squirm...  
And get nervous...  
And to reassure her...  
That it's going to be ok...  
You are with her.  
And if you go down...  
At least you go down together!

Or more importantly...  
When someone you love dies... **[9 Comfort]**  
And you get cards... and calls...  
And all kinds of love and support...  
And you know...

Even though they may not know what to do...  
They are with you.  
They love you.  
They will be there...  
To do whatever needs to be done...  
To help you get through...  
The hardest time.

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Well... it's the same thing with God. **[10 With You]**  
That's why Jesus was born...  
Why he left the comfort... the safety... the glory...  
Of the Kingdom of God.  
To become one of us.

He did it... so you would know.  
You are not alone.  
You are never alone.

Not even...  
In the darkest times...  
In the greatest loss...  
In the midst of pain and sorrow...

In the middle of all that it means...  
To be a human...  
He is too.

Immanuel. God is with you.  
Jesus the Lord of Heaven and Earth...  
Is with you.



And the best news is...  
He will be with you...  
Now and forever.  
Come what may.

So. Thanks be to God! Amen!