

## **“Mighty God”**

**Isaiah 9:2-7**

**Second Sunday in Advent**

**December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Andy Kinsey**

***“For unto us a child is born...Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...”***

**Isaiah 9:6**

### **Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, may we understand the words of the prophet: that the time has come to receive the wonders of your love in the birth of the Messiah Jesus, in whose mighty name we pray. Amen.

### **Message**

Several years ago, Facebook had a policy to reject people with unusual last names. For example, if your last name was *Christmas*, you had a problem. Facebook would not accept you.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the gatekeepers of this social media empire decided that the name “Christmas” could not possibly be a real last name. The same went for families with the last name of Batman, or Pancake, or Yoda. I am not kidding! I am not making this up.

According to Bess “Pancake,” for example, Facebook did not accept her because it thought she was running a breakfast “scam” or something. Becky “Super” also had a similar experience, with all kinds of jokes to follow about being superwoman. The list goes on!

I am not sure if Facebook has changed this policy, but I get the feeling that it is clearly not in touch with the names people have.

I know many folks question Pastor Jenothy about her first name – though I do not think Facebook has rejected her! And I know from time to time I get questions about my last name Kinsey, and if I am related to the famous Alfred

---

<sup>1</sup> “Friending Jesus” at *HomileticsOnline* (December 24, 2009) at [www.franklingrace.org](http://www.franklingrace.org).

Kinsey of Indiana University. Though I lived in Bloomington for a time, I feel I can safely say that we are not related.

However, it is a reminder that names are important, and how we understand names and what they signify matters.

Facebook may reject people because of a last name it cannot possibly imagine a person having, but I would hope that regardless of what the last name is that such folks will find “friends” nevertheless.<sup>2</sup>

### **Names Matter**

Last week, Pastor Jenothy kicked off our Advent sermon series based on the prophet Isaiah’s announcement of the arrival of a new ruler in Israel whose “names” communicate something very important about that ruler:

Isaiah tells us that a child to be born for us, a son given to us, whose *names* are “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

I do not know if Facebook today would reject such names, as they might not line up with current policy, but they are names that tell us something about what we might expect in a new ruler; or at least about what the prophet Isaiah was anticipating about the One whose authority will grow and whose peace shall know no end on the throne of David (v. 7).

It is an announcement that comes to a people who are living in a time of deep darkness and in a time of uncertainty about the future.

I think as Christians that one of the great challenges we have is to read these words through the eyes of Christ, and to notice how, in Christ, they take on a new frame of reference: the way they connect to the baby in Bethlehem and to the Son of God on the cross.<sup>3</sup>

When Pastor Jenothy spoke last Sunday of Christ as Wonderful Counselor, she mentioned how Christ knows us most fully and loves us most deeply, which is what a good counselor does. A good counselor will point out where we need to grow and how we need to face our problems, leading us to life.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Monica Hesse, “Offbeat Name? Then Facebook Is No Friend,” *The Washington Post* (March 5, 2009), A1.

<sup>3</sup> “Jesus Eyes” at *HomileticsOnline* (December 24, 2005) at [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com).

<sup>4</sup> See Pastor Jenothy Irvine’s sermon “Wonderful Counselor” from November 29, 2020 at [www.franklingrace.org](http://www.franklingrace.org).

This week we focus on the name “Mighty God” and seek to understand how this name points to who Christ is for us. As Walter Bruggemann points out in his little devotion book *Names of the Messiah*, this whole passage refers to the way the people viewed the importance of the ruler in Israel and to the characteristics of that ruler – or how this person would need to lead.<sup>5</sup>

An effective king in Israel would strive to protect the people in battle, and would ensure success in the realm of the economy; he would promote justice and righteousness, especially toward those who were on the margins or from different countries.<sup>6</sup> Such a ruler would deliver victory, not just as part of a military campaign but as part of God’s greater work for good – a reminder that this person was always dependent on God and God’s purposes (vv.18-19).<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the adjective “mighty” refers to such power, or to the ways the king will execute it on behalf of God and the people, meaning that if the king were acting only for himself, or only thinking about protecting or promoting his own self-interests, he would face God’s wrath or God’s judgement.<sup>8</sup>

Such a leader is not a leader in the biblical sense. Rather, when we think of leadership with respect to the Bible, or to the kind of “power and might” Jesus will demonstrate during his ministry, we face a “power and might” that goes the very heart of God – to the very identity of the kind of Messiah Jesus will be. More often than not, such “power and might” will run counter to what the “Romes” or “Assyrias” of the world consider as powerful and mighty.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus’ “might” is not a “might” or “authority” that comes out of manipulation or violence. No, the power Jesus will display is a power over sin and death itself, as he engages these powers, not on their terms but on his terms – which means out of the power of love and grace.<sup>10</sup> Jesus will subvert the powers of this world by imploding them from within, revealing that they are nothing. In Jesus’ kingdom, there is a reversal of power and might, where the weak are strong, and strong serve others.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Walter Bruggemann, *Names of the Messiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2016), 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:7-10;

The first are last, and the last are first.<sup>12</sup> The proud go away hungry, while the hungry eat.<sup>13</sup> The naked receive clothing, and those in prison released.<sup>14</sup> Forgiveness comes to us from a cross, while life comes out of a grave.<sup>15</sup> It all seems so backwards!

### **When Darkness Comes**

Unless you are living in darkness. Unless you feel weak or isolated, ashamed, or depressed, and then Isaiah's words begin to take on new life. Indeed, in reading this passage this week, I realized how Isaiah, before mentions the names of who God is, speaks of a "deep darkness" and a "great light." In Hebrew, "deep darkness" literally means "death-shadow." The people who are living in the land of deep darkness are living in the shadow of death, and if you are thinking Psalm 23 right now, you are on target: though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew root-word is similar in both verses: we are not dealing here with the absence of light *per se*, but with the darkness of "death" itself, to which, in Bible's way of thinking, is terrifying!

And I cannot help but think that what we are experiencing, or what is happening in this country and around the world, with respect to the coronavirus pandemic – is akin to a "deep-darkness," or a walking-through-the-valley-of-the-shadow-of- death.

Yes, there is hope for a vaccine, and we can be grateful; but what we are seeing now on a daily basis is not just an absence of light, but a shadow of death – with record numbers of people dying of COVID-19, and with more and more cases being reported, with those on the frontline in our health-care systems and mental health facilities depleted; and with a growing gap in who receives help and who does not – not just in health services but basic services.

For example, this week I spoke on the phone with a senior citizen here in Franklin. She is on Medicare, and she wanted to know how she could get one of the food boxes we were distributing. She lives alone. She doesn't have transportation. She needed someone to help her.

---

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 20:16.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:26.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 25:26-27.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 23:24.

<sup>16</sup> See "Jesus Eyes" in *HomileticsOnline* (December 24, 2005) at [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com).

Thankfully, we worked out transportation for her in the coming week, but I wondered how many more people there are like her! She was not just hungry for food, though she was. She was hungry for human contact!

Indeed, we know that something terrible is happening in our societal relationships when we now have children age twelve thinking of suicide or even committing suicide, as we have learned from our daughter Hannah who is working as a counselor. When I was twelve, I didn't even know what suicide was!

Deep darkness? Shadow of death?

To be sure, we as Christians do not need to live in fear, as our faith says otherwise (1 John 4:18). Jesus is the one who offers light and hope and wisdom. Christ is with us, after all – Emmanuel (Matthew 28:20).

But we also don't need to fall for the next car salesman who tells us the pandemic is not real, or that everything around the corner is a conspiracy. Ignorance is not a Christian virtue, and disinformation and dishonesty are but themselves forms of darkness. There is another Way besides fear and isolation: there is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

### **Closing Invitation**

Hence, the announcement of the prophet Isaiah that a Savior is born unto us, a Son given to us, whose might and light can deliver us from the darkness and whose power can penetrate the walls of our selfishness, whose authority gives us life rather than death, and whose rule is about justice and righteousness!

This is what the Spirit of the Lord is about, about the One upon whose shoulders we can rest, in whose mission we can participate and by whose love we can receive and accept, strengthening us as we go and sharing with others the news that we indeed serve a mighty God. Amen.