

Immanuel

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

My grandmother Marie Drevlow was my favorite person for a long time. When I was growing up in a family of six kids I didn't perhaps get all the attention I craved. I would often stay with Marie in the summertime to help out and it was just me and her and she loved me very much.

My aunts and uncles for a long time would gather at Marie's house to celebrate Christmas Day. I have many fond memories of that time but after a while, grandma wasn't up to putting all that on and then eventually she moved into an apartment and didn't have the space.

Another sad part of the story was that my aunts and uncles later in life didn't get along great. Once Grandma stopped having celebrations they kind of grew apart. So, Grandma was often sort of fought over as to where she would spend Christmas. Now, when I was in college, I was nearby and I could pick her up and often then she would spend holidays with us but one year my aunt Laurel was determined to have grandma with her so she was setting up transport and everything. I was disappointed that I wouldn't see Marie but lo and behold she called and asked, "When will you be picking me up?" I replied, "I thought aunt Laurel was going to have you over?" "No," she said, "I would rather be with you Ryan." And that was that.

Grandma and I sat on the couch and talked then over those few days and I spoke to her about going into ministry. She had a lot to say about that considering she had married a pastor. And then before you knew it the holiday was over, I needed to get back to school and Grandma needed to get home.

She went into the nursing home a year later and then died 6 months after that. I always think of that holiday especially lately. That time we were together in each other's presence. It matters you know? It matters and covid tried to fool us that screens were the same as presence;

they aren't. Perhaps you can think of someone you would love to sit down with on the couch and just talk to them. To be in their presence. That is why the name Immanuel means so much. Because God wishes to be in our presence. To be near us and love us.

This season can be a lot of things. We can blow it out of proportion and hang all our hopes on it that all the memories and gifts and family time will somehow make things better. We can also ignore it. Treat the time as just another Day in the year and just another set of Sundays. This season may be for you a time of joy and happiness like no other. Perhaps your needs are looked after and your joy is accounted for by someone else. Perhaps it isn't a very good time for you and your family. Maybe you are struggling personally despite all the joy of the season. That could be possible too. If you are happy or sad, if you are satisfied or unsatisfied, Jesus is the answer to the problem you probably didn't even know you were asking.

The problem is tied to the human condition. We can see the problems in the world. We can see the sickness and depravity, despair and brokenness. We can see the sin seeping out of the many places in the world. Sin, or despair, or brokenness has consequences and we can feel those consequences all the time. And so we ask a question, Is God really with us or not?

It's actually a question that's been asked before. The Israelites asked this question a lot. In Exodus 17 it states, **they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"** They were grumbling against Moses and grumbling about the lack of water and food. Here are the problems lord and we are hungry, are you with us or not?

To help the people of Israel, the Lord eventually came down and dwelled in the tabernacle or temple as a pillar of cloud and smoke. Imagine that, you wake up in the morning and the Lord is literally dwelling in your camp. You can point to him and know he is near. But it wouldn't last. Eventually the people would fall so astray and sin so much that they put pagan idols up inside the Lord's temple. The Lord could no longer dwell with his people. He was

righteous and they were sinful and sinful things don't/can't exist in the presence of a holy God. To dwell on earth he would have to destroy all that was sinful and unfortunately that included all of Israel.

No, his presence would eventually leave the temple and judgement would come. The people wondered, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***" The Lord's people would be carted off into Babylon and they would wonder, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***" Isaiah sends a message to people who feel alone and abandoned by their Lord. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** God says through Isaiah, **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shalt call his name Immanuel.**

This was such comforting Gospel to a people who felt abandoned because the name Immanuel means "God With Us." El being short for Elohim and the rest of the word filled with prepositions and pronouns giving us the idea "With Us".

The people of Israel were abandoned and alone. The rich oppressed the poor and the country was on the brink of destruction by the Assyrians and Babylonians. People in these kinds of situations begin to doubt God and say, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***"

And what of you? Are you lonely? Is someone you love sick? Are you sick? Are you afraid of how depraved and indifferent to suffering this world has become? Are you afraid of the future and what it has in store? Is there a lack of money or health or family? Do you feel as though the Lord has abandoned you? Are you asking, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***"

But we aren't the first, we aren't even the most important person to ask that question. I imagine that is how Jesus felt as well. Hanging there, alone, abandoned by most of his followers. Naked and ashamed. Bleeding and in great agony. He hung there and asked a variation of the question we might ask him, not, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***" but rather, "**Father, why have you**

forsaken me?" Yes the Lord was among us. And yes the Lord was our Immanuel but we loved him not. We forsook him and abandoned him to chase after easier lives.

And in our failure, for three days, we thought we were alone. For three days we thought, "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" And on that third day of light and joy and hope and peace he arose. He arose to conquer our sin and our failures. He arose to conquer our problems and our deficiencies. He healed our wounds by suffering his.

We live in a difficult world full of sin. It is hard to live here sometimes, but he has come. He is our Immanuel. We are not here alone but rather we are here with Jesus. He came to dwell with his people in the muck and the mire, in our brokenness and sadness, in our sorrows and in our joys. He lived with his disciples, with men and women, he lived with people just like us. He died to save them and us. He rose from the dead to rescue them and us. We may feel alone at times and the world may feel difficult at times but the Lord is here. He is here in the Good News preached. He is here in the forgiveness of sins offered in the place. He is here in the body and blood offered from this altar. He is here because we are gathered as a church and he has promised he will be here. **Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."**

I sure do miss my grandma Marie. I miss being in her presence but I know that God is present in my life in numerous ways. And I know that he is present, very present, in the life of my Grandmother. For a time, I am separate from her but someday we will all be united in the resurrection. Until that time, I am thankful that my Jesus will never abandon me.

It may seem like a simple statement but listen, you broken hearted people looking for mercy and grace, Jesus is our Immanuel. He has come to be with us to dwell with us and that is the greatest hope we ever could have had. "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" Yes, Yes, Immanuel is here with us. Amen