

Sermon – Epiphany V
Christ Episcopal Church, Media, Pennsylvania
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Isaiah 40:21-31
5 February 2012

You have probably heard me reference my role as a parent in previous sermons. I have to also let you know that I am painfully aware that in four year's time my six year old will be a ten year old, and ten years of age is when the age of embarrassment begins, and at that time I will need to stop using incidents from parenthood in sermons.

But right now I have to indulge because it is impossible to read Isaiah chapter 40 and not be reminded of last week.

Last week I was in charge of my six year old boy and my four year old girl. It was late Wednesday afternoon, and as is often the case they wanted to watch their favorite cartoon. Their favorite cartoon is called Sean the Sheep, and it about some sheep and a shepherd. However, television watching for these two is reserved for only between the hours of 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday (a.k.a. quiet time). So after they made their petition, I told them, "No, no watching Sean the sheep today."

And then the four year old girl, who is a very devious person, she got an idea. She went over to her brother and whispered, **THIS LOUD** ---. This devious child whispered to her brother, "I have an secret! Let's go upstairs and watch Sean the Sheep, and not tell Daddy!"

I looked up at her, from two feet away, and I said, “Sweet girl, I am sitting right here, and sound travels.”

She looked at me stupefied, and in any case it did not matter that she had this devious plan because I am the only person in my house who knows how to work all of our remote controls.

Just like it took my daughter some disappointing experiences to understand that Daddy can hear her when she, WHISPERS LIKE THIS... It took the Israelites a bit of learning to figure out that the LORD God was always in their presence.

You can imagine how a person’s relationship with God can get compartmentalized. Certainly you know someone who does this, or maybe you have even done it yourself, saying, “I have my work life here in box #1; I have my family life here in box #2; and I have my faith life over here in box #3.”

And each realm, when they are separated, has its own sets of rules and norms. The Israelites tried this. They tried to sneak around God and do certain things while God was supposed to be otherwise occupied, and to this the prophet 2nd Isaiah said, “No.”

You can not keep work life separate from family life, because the LORD God is LORD of all.

Isaiah says,

Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

You can not hide from God. Everything you do is known to God. And this is good news. God knows you. God has always been there.

It is intimidating to think of God as inhabiting a little camera, over there in the corner of the ceiling in a little black pod with one was glass globe covering the camera, and that camera is everywhere.

It is also liberating to know God is all is all, and God understands well beyond our understanding. Our God is the creator of the ends of the earth. Our God gives power to the faint, and strength to the powerless.

I know of a people who definitely take seriously the belief that God is everywhere.

Anyone who cares about quality furniture knows that furniture that comes from the Shaker Christian community is the best. If you can get yourself a Shaker table, it is the best table, If you can get yourself a Shaker cabinet, it is the best cabinet.

And, you can even turn over your Shaker table or your Shaker cabinet, and you will see, in the hidden section of the furniture, the section of the furniture that only movers see, you will see that even the hidden sections of Shaker furniture display beautiful craftsmanship.

The reason the Shakers take this amount of care with their trade... The take this care because God sees the bottom of that cabinet. God sees the underside of that table.

To this reality, a question arises, Why is the prophet Isaiah telling Israel this. Why does he need to tell them that God sees everything? First, it is clear that some Israelites really believed that it was possible to sneak around God. And there is a second reason.

The second reason Isaiah said this is because Isaiah had just begun to tell the Israelites about the coming of the Messiah. Whether you know it or not, you have heard Isaiah 40.

You have heard Isaiah say,

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished.

You have heard Isaiah say,

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill
shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places
plain.

You have heard Isaiah say,

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it
together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

These are all from Isaiah chapter 40 and they precede our reading from today. Isaiah not only says that Our God is the Creator of the ends of the earth, Isaiah also says that God is coming to be among us. That is Isaiah tells of the coming of Emmanuel, God with us.

Not only does God know the innermost secrets of your heart. God came to live as a human being and feel what it is like to be a human.

Our God, who created the ends of the earth, our God does not just sit up on high and judge people's righteousness. Our God was born as a baby and lived among us as one of us.