

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: AND HE SHALL BE CALLED
Sermon: Wonderful Counselor

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Psalms 9:1-2

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
2
I will be glad and rejoice in you;
I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.

Isaiah 28:23-29

Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say.
24
When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually?
Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil?
25
When he has leveled the surface,
does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin?
Does he not plant wheat in its place,
barley in its plot, and spelt in its field?
26
His God instructs him
and teaches him the right way.
27
Caraway is not threshed with a sledge,
nor is the wheel of a cart rolled over cumin;
caraway is beaten out with a rod,
and cumin with a stick.
28
Grain must be ground to make bread;
so one does not go on threshing it forever.
The wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it,
but one does not use horses to grind grain.
29
All this also comes from the Lord Almighty,
whose plan is wonderful,
whose wisdom is magnificent.

Sermon

It was a weekend last summer, and I was driving with all of the windows down, enjoying the breeze, letting my hair fly in the wind. OK, that's an exaggeration. But it felt good. I reached home, and I began to roll up the windows. Rain was coming. But one back window wasn't working. I played with the switch, I played with my switch, I played with all the switches. This thing wasn't budging. I checked the fuse box, I tried to jimmy the thing up. Nothing. Weekend, so no shop was open. So finally, I resolved to the inevitable. I asked Google. An hour later, as sprinkles were coming down, I was sitting in my driveway with my laptop on a covered workbench, watching a youtube video about how to take off the inner door panel to get to the glass. I don't know about these newer cars, there are screws and bolts hidden everywhere you wouldn't think to look. But an hour or two on youtube got me thru. We were able to manually crank up the window. That week, the auto shop said they could fix it, but it'd be a few hundred dollars. It's a back window. We didn't fix it. If you're riding with me and you need to know where your emergency exit is, it's not the window. You're on your own.

But I'm amazed at how much technical assistance I get from technology these days. If I'm repairing the garbage disposal, I go to youtube. If I have weird symptoms, I go to webMD and self diagnose myself (doctors love that). When I built a playhouse in the back, I went from a set of drawings and a plan. When I do my taxes, I run sample forms and find answers on tax forums. Even my pedometer has a little screen that says, "Time to get up and walk". OK, little pedometer, you're probably right. But if I need to fix something or technical assistance in anyway, I'll find it generally online. The world has certainly changed. But the point is, we all could use someone to call when we need help.

Sunnyside Counseling service skit:

If you are obsessive-compulsive: Press 1—repeatedly.

If you are co-dependent: Ask someone else to press 2.

If you have multiple personalities: Press 3,4, & 5.

If you are paranoid: Do not press a button and stay on the line. We are tracing this call.

If you are schizophrenic: Listen carefully. A small voice will tell you which button to press.

If you have short term memory loss: Please call back later.

If you suffer from low self-esteem: Hang up. Our operators are too busy to talk to you.

In this season of Advent, I want us to ruminate on that ancient ancient scripture from Isaiah:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah gives this child to be four names, and we happen to have four Sundays in Advent. So each Sunday we'll explore each of these kingly titles - starting with today, Wonderful Counselor. Handel, in his Messiah, splits it up by putting a comma inbetween, And he shall be called, Wonderful. Counselor. But its really smushed together: Wonderful Counselor. But just so you know, that's not what this title of Christ is about. It's not saying that Jesus is a wonderful therapist. Wonderful counselor. Big difference.

So what was going on with Isaiah that he would write such words? Isaiah was a prophet 700+ years before Christ. That's 2,700 years ago. A long time. And the ancient empires were doing their thing. Assyria was the greatest empire at the time this passage was written. This is hundreds of years before Rome is even around. On the map, the dark green was the Assyrian territory in 824 BC. The light green was the Assyrian empire in 671 BC. This prophecy was given around 730 BC. That means the Assyrian empire had been expanding for 100 years before this, and would continue to expand for another 60 years. Everyone was terrified of Assyria, and the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel (Judah, the southern kingdom, is the yellow blob on the map) were right in the middle of everything. Assyria was just going to swallow up the whole world. The Assyrian king, took part of Galilee, which was in the northern kingdom, sometime before 731 BC. Ahaz, who was king of Judah, saw what was happening to the Northern Kingdom and was afraid. Because of this fear, he adopted a

pro-Assyrian foreign policy. Let's just give in. I know God said that he'd give us this land, but Assyria is too big, too strong. We've got to capitulate.

Isaiah comes to the king and says: you are not depending on God to save you. You are depending on that Assyria will leave you alone if you play nice with them. Assyria will come, all right. He'll come like a flood, and the waters are going to be up to your neck! Chapter 8, right before today's passage. Is there any hope for this young nation, this nation that gone wayward in the eyes of the Lord? And that's when we get chapter nine. A new child is born in the king's household. Hezekiah, who would grow up to be a good king, much better than the bums they've had in recent generations. Everytime a child is born, it shows that God hasn't given up on us just yet. Things look bleak, but life goes on. Verses 4, 5 and 6 of this passage all begin with the Hebrew word *ki*. It's a "key" word. It means "for," or "because." The things that happen in verses 2 and 3 happen because of what we find in verses 4, 5 and 6. And they escalate, building up to verse 6, which presents the central idea of this passage: Because this Child is born, everything changes; because the son is given, there is hope in the face of fear. Now, Isaiah was using it for Hezekiah, but we Christians have used this verse for years as we look at Jesus.

The context of this passage is not psychological, it's political. It's about nations and wars and kingdoms and thrones and governments. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. These four names of the Messiah are what historians call Throne Names. They are names ascribed to a King that speak of the extent of his authority and the nature of his rule.

All great kings and rulers surround themselves with wise counselors. In times of peace and especially in times of war. Historians say that one of the reasons Queen Elizabeth was such a great ruler was the wisdom of her counselors. She chose two men—William Cecil and Francis Walsingham. They were astute. They were fearless. They were utterly loyal to queen and country. They always told her what they thought was best for the crown and for England, even if it made her mad. She often let them have it with her infamous temper. But when Cecil died Elizabeth said: "No prince in Europe had such a counselor."

Jesus Christ, this baby to be born, is our Wonderful Counselor. Do you follow your counselor's advice?

Our Lord does several things when we turn to Him as our counselor. First, He tells us the truth. You want that from a counselor, right? He tells us what is really wrong with our lives. He points out that we are rebelling against God. We are like sheep who have gone astray. He tells us that we need to repent of our sin. The first step in addressing your problems is to admit that there is a problem. He is like a Doctor who tells someone suffering from emphysema that they need to stop smoking cigarettes and stop hanging around with people who smoke. Understanding what is causing the problem is essential before you can solve the problem.

Second, Jesus tells us to trust what He has done for us. In Matthew 20:28 we read, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus understood that we could not save ourselves. Something needed to be done for us. Jesus didn't just tell us that we needed help. He provided the help we need. I want to know that my counselor understands my problems. And Jesus was tempted in every way, and he walked this earth and had joys and hardships like everybody.

Third, our Counselor gives us a prescription for life that will help us continue to live a spiritually healthy life. This prescription is found in the Bible. In John, Jesus said,

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." . . . "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

People who have had heart surgery are given a prescription. They are told to walk regularly, to watch their diet, to take their medicine and to get their regular check-ups. If you do those things, you will get better and be able to enjoy your life. But if you ignore those prescriptions you will not regain your strength or vitality and will probably die much sooner.

Our Lord has given us His prescription for joyful living. He told us to resist the morality and advice of the world and to follow God's directions. Practically, that means

- We are to trust Him rather than trusting ourselves
- We are to love rather than take advantage of one another
- We are to forgive rather than be bitter
- We are to be holy rather than profane
- We are to store up treasures in Heaven rather than on earth
- We are to be generous rather than selfish
- We are to seek to serve rather than be served

The counsel of Jesus is superb. He understands our situation and has addressed with love and wisdom. However, most people don't know this because they haven't given His counsel a chance.

This morning, my message is simple. Jesus is the wonderful counselor. But counselors only work when we listen to them. If you would ask Jesus this morning, "Jesus, any advise on what I need to do to help fix my life", what do you think he's say? He's not just any counselor, he's a wonderful counselor. Maybe he'd tell me not to stress about tomorrow. I think he said something like that once upon a time. Maybe he'd tell me I could do my share of the chores, or show appreciation to those who make our household work. Maybe he'd tell me to stop beating myself up something that happened decades ago, but still bugs me. I got some ideas on what he'd might say. If I go to youtube to fix a broken water heater, maybe I should go to Jesus to fix a broken heart. What would he say to you?

This Advent season, may we live by the counsel of this baby to be born, For unto us a child is born, a son has been given. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We could sure use a Wonderful counselor today. And the family of God said, Amen.