

Sermon 2010 Advent 4
Text: Is. 7:10-17
Theme: "Here's Your Sign"
December 19, 2010

Comedian, Bill Engvall, has a very funny routine that suggests that stupid people should have to wear a sign around their necks to warn others that they are stupid. The sign would simply state, "I'm stupid." It's sort of like a public service announcement - or a surgeon general's warning. He goes on to tell stories of situations in which he would have gladly handed out such a sign.

For instance, one time he pulled into a service station with a flat tire. The attendant came out of the garage and asked, "Tire go flat?"

"Nope," responded Engvall, "I was just driving down the street and them other 3 swelled up! Here's your sign."

King Ahaz should have had a sign. He was a king who had personally witnessed God's power over and over again and he yet still doubted him. Can you imagine a person who witnesses God at work in his life - sees his power clearly demonstrated all around him and still he doubts? Maybe we should all have signs too, huh?

God provides all that we need and still more. God forgives us all our sins against him with the life and soul of his own son. God promises us eternal life with him and seals that promise with the bodily resurrection of Jesus. And still we want a clearer sign? How about one that says "I'm stupid?"

Maybe Joseph would have been exempt from a sign though. I am always astounded at Joseph's faith. When one's fiancée turns up pregnant, and you know that you are not the father because you have not been intimate with her, especially in that day and time, one breaks off the engagement and moves on. Can you imagine the heat Joseph took from friends and family when he walked into the kitchen and announced that Mary

was pregnant and he was not the father? Then to add on, he would have to explain that an angel came to him in the night and told him that God had impregnated his fiancée and that the baby should be named Jesus because he would save all God's people. Not such an easy task really.

Ahaz, on the other hand, was only in a tight political spot and was invited to ask God for a sign to encourage him and comfort the people.

"Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 'ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.'" Ahaz was too busy trying to fix things himself however. Who needs God? This was not religious business – this was serious political stuff. Like when people tell me in church meetings that they know this is the church but we have to make smart business decisions. No we don't. This isn't a business and the minute we start acting like it is, we start failing. Well it might be God pleasing to help the poor, teach the youth and fund missions but we would rather have a big fat bank account. Really? Well here's your sign. And just like us, Ahaz tried to sound all pious and holy,

"I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." But the reality is that Ahaz didn't trust God and was afraid that if he asked for a sign and God didn't deliver, all of his fornicating, blaspheming, godless friends would mock him. So he chose to go it alone and we all know how well that worked out for him – here's your sign – off to Babylon with you.

I don't want a sign that says I'm stupid, so how did Joseph avoid it and why did Ahaz embrace it? Joseph was a simple man, no doubt, but in his simplicity, apparently much wiser than Ahaz. He chose to trust God – even if it looked dumb by worldly standards, he chose to trust God. It is that simple and that profound. When you look at the promises and choose to trust God, things may not work out the way you thought, but they will always work out for your good. When you choose to trust your own ideas – well – here's your sign.

The crux of the whole thing is this. How do we get to the point where we can fully and completely trust God like Joseph and put all our Ahaz-like stupidity behind us? Want a sign that shows you that God will always deliver? You are not going to find it in the Wall Street Journal. Your horoscope will not help you because it is of Satan, not God. While your financial planner can help you manage the money God has given you and your doctor can help you manage the gift of your physical body, neither can help you trust in God.

Want a sign from God? Look at the altar. There sits the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Look up from that and you see the cross, the instrument through which he sacrificed his body and blood for us and look to the center of that cross and see the manger. There is the fulfillment of his first promise to come to us born of a virgin – to be as one of us – to die as one of us for all of us. There's your sign. He did it. Why would we ever doubt that he will return for us as well? But just in case we do, we are filled with his body and blood which strengthens our hand of faith that grabs a hold of the gift of grace and hangs on tightly no matter what this life dishes out.

I saw a car the last time I was down in southern Indiana. It had a large gash on its side. One of the doors was held together with bailing wire. The windshield was spider webbed with cracks. Several body parts were rusted through and falling off. I couldn't tell the original color of the car. Between the rust and multiple paint jobs, any one of several color options could have been the first coat. The most interesting thing about the car, though, was the bumper sticker. As if to be sure that there would be no misunderstanding, it said: "This is not an abandoned car."

A long time ago, a baby was born in a manger. He is the Savior of the entire world. He was a sign to us, a sign that tells us that this is not an abandoned world and we are not an abandoned people.