

# “THERE IS NO OTHER GOD AND SAVIOR”

December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Christmas 1B

Isaiah 45:20-25

There's a man out in the woods gathering wood to make a fire. It's getting towards night and the temperature is dropping. Eventually he makes it back to his small, wooden hut. There's a hole cut in the roof to allow the smoke to escape. He squats down and builds a fire. He starts with some birch bark, then little twigs, and works his way up to bigger sticks. As he's going through the wood he is collecting, he picks up two logs and considers both. He weighs them in his hands. Takes note of their shape, but then chooses one and sets it aside. The other one he throws into the fire. Soon, some coals have built up and he cooks himself a meal. Afterward, while he's digesting, he takes the log he set aside. He starts carving it. Soon, it takes the shape of a man. He finishes carving all of the details he wants into the wood and then he sets it on a shelf built into his wall. He gets on his knees and starts bowing down to it. He cries out: "Save me! You are my God!"

I doubt the worship of idols and false gods comes about as flagrantly as that story, but the point is always the same. That idol was no god. It had no power. It could not see, it could not feel, it could not save that man. No matter how much he might cry out, or whatever sacrifices he might offer, it's a piece of wood. It's lifeless. It cannot help him, unless he decided to throw it into the fire—to burn it with the rest of the wood where it belongs. Otherwise, they are without help. That is what the prophet Isaiah points out in the lesson this morning: **“Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save”** (Isaiah 45:20). Anyone who hopes in a god who is not the Lord is ignorant; they are without help. They are looking to answer the one question that every person needs to answer, but they are asking the question into the void. A log or a rock or an idea is not going to answer them.

It's important for us to talk about idols. As far as I can tell, there's three reasons that it's so important. The first is that there are so many. Around the world, driven by their innate knowledge that there is a God, cultures have found someone or something to worship. Throughout history, everyone worships some god or goddess. None of them are or were the true God, but you know that. They were ignorant because they claimed to know what they didn't know. But, mostly, they were ignorant because they didn't know the way to be saved. No matter who their God was—Shiva or Allah or Baal or Molech or Buddha or whatever—none of them could give them what they needed to live after death—to answer that ultimate question.

Despite that ignorance, though, the followers still believed. They doubled down on that ignorance and believed they had the answer. They have faith, but don't make the mistake of thinking their faith is anything like yours. They had passion, but their faith was blind. Their faith is blind hope

that they might be right about what they believe. The third reason it's important to talk about idols is that they're nothing like the true God. These idols create a false faith. They give knowledge that only leads to ignorance. They might be made of wood or stone. They might be a cosmic personality. They might be your bank account. They might be your health or your friends, or your wife, or your children, or yourself. Whatever the idol is, it's one of your own making. Something that you have formed into your god, like that man formed that piece of wood.

Often when the Bible talks about idols, it's in the form of condemnation. It's important that we talk about idols because not only do they not save, but having a false god condemns. The Bible wants you to know that—if you are trusting in anything other than the Lord for anything in life, then you are lost. The Bible does talk about that, but that isn't Isaiah's only point here. Yes, those who hold to their idols are ignorant and lacking salvation, but the call still goes out to them: **“Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. [...] Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together”** (Isaiah 45:20-21). God is calling out to those who trust in other gods to believe in him. He calls them “fugitives from the nations.” These people were formerly prisoners, held captive by nations who did not believe in the true God. For whatever reason, they came out of those nations. Once prisoners, now fugitives, but they Lord will make them family.

In our country, as important as freedom of religion is to us, we don't often display our beliefs. You might live next to a person and never know if they're a Christian, an Muslim, a Jew, a Buddhist, or whatever. But, one thing aspect of religion we often show is superstition. I don't think we talk about it very often, because it seems harmless. I remember reading an article last year while the Packers were in the playoffs (forgive me for talking about the Packers) about a man who put a jersey on his dog and posted a picture of it on the internet. If he did that, the Packers would win. Guess what happened. That seems harmless, but it's so widespread. Superstition is more than sports and black cats and broken mirrors. It's a matter of the heart that says, “If I do this small thing, then I have control over what is going to happen,” or, even more crassly, “I influence whoever or whatever is controlling everything.” It's as if God is not the one in control, there's something beyond him that is truly in control, who works through ridiculous things like football jerseys, knocking on wood, and not saying something otherwise it won't happen. But there is no other God. There is only the Lord and he doesn't care for superstition.

The Lord says, **“There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me”** (Isaiah 45:21). Notice the two ideas that go together here. They're so closely aligned that you can't separate them. The Lord is God, but what makes him special? What makes him a God that is different than any other? How is your faith different than any follower of another religion? Because he is not only God, but he is also a Savior. It is only this God that sees us putting our trust everywhere but in him—still he calls

us out of idolatry, out of false faith, out of misplaced hope, and from knowledge that leads to ignorance—and he draws us to himself. **“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame”** (Isaiah 45:22-24).

God says that every tongue will some day say, **“In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength,”** and we’re ready to do that now. It is through the Lord, the Son of God, who came as your Savior, that you receive righteousness. That righteousness can only come from God, so that when the Father sees you, he sees someone who has never sinned, never trusted in a false idol, never given their heart to another god. He sees Jesus who did not waver, but with an undivided heart kept God first in his life, knowing that there is no other God and Savior. It is through the Lord, the Son of God, who is your God, that you receive strength. That strength can only come from God, the strength to keep the first commandment. That commandment says, “You shall have no other gods.” And what does this mean? “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” The strength to keep that commandment is faith. The faith God gives you fears, loves, and trust in God above all things.

Simeon and Anna received from God that righteousness and strength. Listen to how God describes these two faithful believers. About Simeon he said, **“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ”** (Luke 2:25-26). Listen to what God says about Anna: **“There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying”** (Luke 2:36-37). They spent all their time waiting for the coming Savior. They were blessed to see the Lord with their own eyes, to see their God and Savior. So that Simeon, by faith, sang that he was now ready to die. Anna gives thanks and goes around telling everyone the Redeemer had come. They were confident that there is no other God and Savior. That Isaiah’s words were true: **“In the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult”** (Isaiah 45:25).

Bow before the Lord your God. In the Lord find your righteousness and strength. Put your trust in him. You are the descendants of Israel, since you are descendants by faith. He has sent Christ to show you there is no other God and Savior. There is only the Lord. Come and exult him. Gather together and proclaim what he has done. He is the Lord. He is your Lord. Say with Simeon: **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have**

**prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).** There is no other God and Savior, but the Lord. Amen.