



Everywhere a Sign

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“God spoke to King Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ When Ahaz refused, God said, ‘Then I myself will choose the sign: See this young woman who is pregnant? By the time her child is old enough to know right from wrong, the threat of war will be over.’” (Isaiah 7:10-16, abridged)

If you’re watching for a divine sign that all will be well, a holy omen that God’s goodness will work out a way, there are plenty of potential portents to choose from:

Perhaps the daffodil as it blooms after winter hibernation is God’s sign to you from the earth. Perhaps the late-winter frost that dazzles in the morning sun is God’s sign to you from the sky.

Maybe the eerie blue underbelly of a flipped-over iceberg in Antarctica is God’s sign from the seas, letting you know change will come. Maybe a meteor exploding over Ohio is God’s sign from the heavens, promising you divine intervention.

King Ahaz wanted a divine sign of assurance in the face of rising political threats. God offered a sign as lofty as the stars. “It’s too much,” Ahaz protested. God offered a sign as certain as death’s door. “I don’t want you to go to any great lengths,” Ahaz demurred.

The porridge is too hot. The chair is too

small. Give me comfort that is right-sized, please and thank you. And surely God sighed such a mighty, exasperated sigh that the olive trees bent in the wind and the crows startled into the sky.

“Fine, I’ll give you a practical sign,” God told Ahaz. “Count this young woman’s months of pregnancy and her son’s early childhood. That’s how much time will pass before the threats have ceased. On that day, everyone will eat curds and honey.” On that day, God’s sign of comfort will become God’s fulfillment of goodness.

God gave Ahaz a right-sized sign: a tangible measure he could count on his fingers, a growing measure he could watch unfold before him, a flesh-and-blood measure he could recognize. A divine sign for human understanding.

If you’re watching for a divine sign that all will be well, a holy omen that God’s goodness will work out a way, a portent of comfort that God’s justice will be realized and evil will be vanquished, there’s no shortage of signs ... but maybe tune your heart most particularly to the flesh-and-blood signs you witness every day. The ones that grow and strive and change. The ones that love and break and love again. The ones that extend grace and don’t give up hope.

Watch for God’s signs. Live as one, too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Hackenberg serves as the publisher of The Pilgrim Press in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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