

Advent 1, November 29, 2020

Text: Isaiah 64:1-9

Theme: Let Me Be Your Clay

The Prophet says:

**¹Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—**

**² as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—**

**to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!**

Isaiah speaks from the perspective of the people of God being in exile in Babylon. By chapter 64, our text for today, he has seen the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, and Judah will be exiled to Babylon in less than 50 years. Isaiah will not live to see it but he is telling the people what they will experience. They will beg the Lord to rend the heavens and come down to deliver them just as he did in the Exodus. They will beg God to do to Babylon what he did to Egypt and deliver them again. They will be sorry for their sins of idolatry, adultery, greed and covetousness, and they will plead with God to forgive them. Of course, the majority of the people to whom Isaiah spoke did not listen to him. In fact, if we believe rabbinic literature of the day, for his efforts, Isaiah was sawn in half by King Manasseh of the Southern Kingdom. The Lord's prophets can be really irritating when you're trying to live your best life.

People did not listen to Isaiah and people do not listen now. You can go into Jewel and proclaim the imminent coming of the Lord and the need for people to repent of their sins and amend their sinful lives. For your efforts you will likely get a lovely room at Good Samaritan's Behavioral Health Center. But nevertheless, Isaiah's message is the still our message. God is coming soon, and he is either coming in joy and comfort or he is coming in wrath, depending on who you are. The prophet speaks,

***³When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.***

***⁴From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.***

***⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.***

Isaiah excitedly looks forward to God's return as all who are righteous do. If you are under God's name, you are excited for his return. When Isaiah says, "You meet him who joyfully works righteousness," that is a Hebrew way of saying God comes with blessings for those who are part of his family. It is not what you do but who you are. If you are in the name of Jesus, God comes with

blessings so you are excited for him to hurry up and get here. You look for him like a child looks for Santa Clause at Christmas. The prophet speaks,

***Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?***

***‘We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.***

***We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.***

We are like a polluted garment. “Polluted garment” is a Hebrew euphemism for a woman’s sanitary pad. In today’s world Isaiah might have said that we are like a dirty Depends lying in the floor of the nursing home. We sin constantly and we are filthy and unclean because of our sin. The difference is not that some sin and others do not. We are all dirty diapers. The difference is that some call upon his name and some think they can either hide their sin or justify their sin for themselves. Some long for him to wash us and make us clean, and some think they can clean themselves, but all they really do is spear the filth around. He prophet speaks,

***’There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,***

and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

Like Isaiah, so too we look around us and see that the people in our society, by and large, do not call on God's name. In the midst of health crises, most people rely on science and government. In the midst of violence, most people rely on police and military. In the midst of financial crises, most people rely on the credit cards or their own ingenuity. It is so seldom that people first call upon God. You will even hear it when people say that they have tried everything else, they might as well pray.

⁸But now, O LORD, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,

and remember not iniquity forever.

Behold, please look, we are all your people.

Advent is a season in which we wait for Jesus to return to take us to paradise much in the same way as Isaiah's people were waiting for God to deliver them from exile and return them to Israel. Now is a time that we remind ourselves that we are not the potters. We are the clay. Our Father who loved us so much that he sent his son to die on the cross and suffer Hell for us is the potter. Advent is a good time to hear Isaiah tell us to just stop. It is easy to begin to

think that we have all the answers. We would do well to turn to God for the answers, and where God's answers conflict with our answers, we're wrong and we repent, that is, we turn around and follow the potter which is just what the clay does over and over again. And we wait for the potter to complete his creation in us and return for us to take us to the place he has prepared for us from the foundations of the world.