

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Wait!

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 64:1-9

¹⁶ you, LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.
¹⁷ Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways
and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes that are your inheritance.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!
² As when fire sets twigs ablaze
and causes water to boil,
come down to make your name known to your
enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!
³ For when you did awesome things that we did not
expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled
before you.
⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

⁵ You come to the help of those who gladly do right,
who remember your ways.
But when we continued to sin against them,
you were angry.
How then can we be saved?
⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
⁷ No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.
⁸ Yet you, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look upon us when we pray,
for we are all your people.

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down ...!” (Is 64:1) Isaiah begs.

Can you imagine what that would look like? The terror that would cause? As the sky literally ripped open and some fire-breathing deity from another world comes down to the suddenly shaking and quaking planet!

But why would Isaiah and the faithful in Israel want such a thing? Why would they want their God to come earth like that?

To get their adversaries, of course. To pay back the invaders of Israel for their sins, especially against the Temple in Jerusalem (cf 63:18, 64:11). To consume them like “when fire sets twigs ablaze” (63:17). To make their enemies tremble like they made Israelites tremble! To show ‘em who’s boss. Show them the God they mock in all his righteous might.

But then Isaiah thinks better of it as the First Lesson continued. “Wait!” he basically says. We’re sinners too. “And all our righteous acts” aren’t so righteous. Really, they “are like filthy rags” (64:6). We don’t pray as we should. We don’t worship as we should. We don’t believe and trust in the Lord our God as we should. We make our neighbors tremble too when we lash out at them. So, if God came down with his righteous fires of judgment to burn up our enemies, that fire would burn us up too.

So maybe not. Don’t rend the heavens and come down. Not yet anyway, Isaiah says as he changes his tune during the verses of today’s First Lesson. Keep being “our Father” instead. “We are the clay, you are the potter” (64:8). Don’t destroy the sinners yet, for you’d have to then destroy us too. Rather keep shaping us, molding us, and forming us to be how you want us to be instead.

Good thoughts with which to begin Advent 2020. For haven’t we times thought the same way, wishing God would come down in righteous anger to smite whomever and whatever is so viciously oppressing his people? Consume like kindling those who openly mock what is right and laugh all the way to the bank while doing so. Make tremble those who always get away with it and never suffer the consequences. Settle the score with those who bend the rules to their own advantage at the expense of everyone else who is playing by them. And while you’re at it, God, how about you root out of the church on earth all those religious leaders who call themselves Christian but are gutting

their churches of even the most basic doctrinal truths of Scripture while pulling the wool over the unsuspecting eyes of their flocks. Get 'em God! Pay them back! Why won't you rend the heavens and come down!?!

Because Isaiah is teaching us today, that would mean God would have to wipe us out too. For the sins we see in others are the sins that live in us too.

So, while the day is certainly coming when Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead, God isn't eager to condemn and destroy. Judging holds no joy for Jesus. Judgment is of the law, but God – though he gave the Law – is not first and foremost about the law. God would rather love and save and forgive and bless. God would rather give his gifts of grace – even if we forget this about him under the strain of living in an imperfect and hostile world. For God gave the Law not so that we would love the Law and feel good about ourselves because of it, but so that we would realize, like Isaiah did, our sinfulness and turn to him as our Father and Savior.

That's why God would first answer Isaiah's begging prayer for him to come down not in terrors but in our flesh and blood. Instead of riding the clouds and throwing thunderbolts at all those who dared assail Jerusalem, he would first be carried into it in his mother's arms and ultimately carry his cross out of it to offer himself upon it to the consuming fire of his Father's wrath against all sin. Only then could God justly forgive sinners and graciously answer that prayer Isaiah prayed, "Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord; do not remember our sins forever" (64:9). Give us your gifts instead.

But maybe we're like Isaiah even here, too, when thinking about the gifts God wants to give us. For if Isaiah wanted God to come with a big show and great power, I wonder if that's the kind of gifts we want too. The impressive ones. The glorious ones. Unmistakable ones. The "awesome things that we did not expect" (64:3) type ones.

But wait! Isaiah realized and we should too that before all that; before God rends the heavens and comes down with his gifts of glory everlasting; maybe we need his humbler gifts first. So that we love not the stuff we want God to give us, but him instead. Because that's what often happens, you know. We love the blessing more than the one who blessed us with it. Like the Israelites of Isaiah's day, who loved the Temple and the fact that it was in their capital more than the God who dwelled in it, giving them the gifts they really needed from it.

So on this First Sunday in Advent, the season of waiting, we should learn from Isaiah that while we wait God to rend the heavens and come down with the big stuff, it is his humble gifts he's given right now that we really need. A little more time in his hands. A little more forming. A little more shaping. A little more molding and making us into the people he would have us be. A holy people made that way through repentance and faith in the righteousness of his Son come down in the flesh. A forgiven and forgiving people, who don't breathe fire but his Spirit ... who'd rather serve than be served. People who understand we're living not yet in a big and glorious kingdom but first in a humbler one of peace and grace in a world gone mad, but filled with people God would rather save than judge.

Wait! Is God waiting for us to be who he's making us in Jesus to be, so that he can? So that we can use his humble gifts for others ... on others? That they too could join us in the eager anticipation of his coming?

Whoa.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- M: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **Amen.**

Advent Wreath Children's Messages (CWOS themes pp. 133,134)

- 11.29 We light one Advent candle, remembering Jesus, who is coming again. He will gather his people from everywhere, both the living and the dead.
- 12.06 We light two Advent candles, remembering Jesus, who came in history. He came into a world of sin and death.
- 12.13 We light three Advent candles, remembering Jesus, the Light of the world. He came to defeat the prince of darkness.
- 12.20 We light four Advent candles, remembering Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary. He came to share our humanity.

Prayers of the Church

- M: To you, O Lord, we lift up our souls and in you we put our trust. Do not let us be ashamed of our hope. Come quickly in your mercy to save us, for one day you will come to judge the living and the dead.

Gracious Lord, continue to give us your gifts as we enter another Church Year. Encourage the preachers of your Word and all who hear, that the testimony about Christ may be confirmed again among us. As you have called us into the fellowship of your Son, so sustain us as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Almighty God, be with the governing authorities and enable them to preserve peace and order in our nation. Hear our prayers for our president; our governor; our military and police; and other civil servants as well as all newly elected officials.

Compassionate Lord, behold in mercy all who are in any danger, trouble, sickness or need. Hear our prayers for the sick and suffering [especially _____]. Give health to our world and bring the pandemic to an end. Comfort all who mourn, [especially _____,] and sustain them with a confident hope in the resurrection.

Into your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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Oh, look upon us when we pray,
for we are all your people.

Mark 13:32-37

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows,
not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,
but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert!
You do not know when that time will come.
³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his
house and puts his servants in charge, each
with their assigned task, and tells the one at
the door to keep watch.
³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not
know when the owner of the house will
come back—whether in the evening, or at
midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at
dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let

him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you,
I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”