**Weekend of Sunday, December 3, 2023**

**1st Sunday of Advent/Lectionary X/Year B**

**First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

**Gospel Reading: Mark 13:24-37**

**Sermon Title: *“The Advent of Hope: Watching, Waiting, and Anticipating”***

**Theme**

*Stir up your power, and come! The psalmist’s plea in Psalm 80:2 has become familiar to us in the Advent prayers. Isaiah wants God to rip the heavens open. Both cry out for an apparently distant, angry God to show up, to save, to restore. When we hear Jesus describing the coming of the Son of Man with stars falling from heaven, it can sound dire and horrible, not like anything we would ever hope for. But when we really look at the suffering of people God loves, we can share the hope that God would tear open the heavens and come.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9**

*This lament comes from a people who have had their hopes shattered. The visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed people of God, spoken of in Isaiah 40–55, have not been realized. Instead, the people experience ruin, conflict, and famine. This lament calls God to account—to be the God who has brought deliverance in the past.*

 1O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
  so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
 2as when fire kindles brushwood
  and the fire causes water to boil—
 to make your name known to your adversaries,
  so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
 3When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
  you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
 4From ages past no one has heard,
  no ear has perceived,
 no eye has seen any God besides you,
  who works for those who wait for him.
 5You meet those who gladly do right,
  those who remember you in your ways.
 But you were angry, and we sinned;
  because you hid yourself we transgressed.
 6We have all become like one who is unclean,
  and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
 We all fade like a leaf,
  and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
 7There is no one who calls on your name,
  or attempts to take hold of you;
 for you have hidden your face from us,
  and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
 8Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
  we are the clay, and you are our potter;
  we are all the work of your hand.
 9Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
  and do not remember iniquity forever.
  Now consider, we are all your people.

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

*As the Christians in Corinth await the advent of Jesus, Paul reminds them how the Lord has already enriched them through spiritual gifts and will continue to strengthen them until the coming day of the Lord.*

3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

 4I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—6just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—7so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Gospel: Mark 13:24-37**

*Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.*

[Jesus said:] 24“In those days, after that suffering,
 the sun will be darkened,
  and the moon will not give its light,
 25and the stars will be falling from heaven,
  and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
26Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. 27Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.
 28“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
 32“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

**Sermon**

As we gather on this First Sunday of Advent, we embark on a journey of anticipation and reflection. The season of Advent calls us to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And while we love to *look back and reflect* on that First Advent when the baby Jesus was born, we need to be reminded that we need to *look forward and anticipate* his promise to return, or what I like to call His Second Advent. Therein lies the true purpose of the celebration of Advent.

Let’s begin with the First Reading from Isaiah. Unlike most prophecies we hear, the voice we hear from the First Reading is the prophet’s. At the beginning, from verses 1 through 5, Isaiah cries out to the LORD to make His presence known again as in the ancient of days. Isaiah knows scripture and knows the story of how the Israelites were chosen to be God’s Chosen People, how the LORD freed them from Pharaoh’s slavery in dramatic fashion, and eventually brought them to the Promised Land.

Then in verses 6 through 7, he acknowledges that all Israel has sinned. He describes the behavior of the Israelites as transgressive, unclean, and filthy. He confesses that as a nation, they have turned their backs on the one true God, the only God that can save them.

And then in verses 8 and 9, Isaiah implores the LORD to remember that He created them and that He can’t simply abandon them forever. Isaiah implores the LORD, “

9Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
  and do not remember iniquity forever.
  Now consider, ***we are all your people***.

I hope you can feel Isaiah’s heartfelt cry, a plea for God to rescue them from their misery. This passage might well be considered a poignant prayer that captures the desperate longing of a people in need of divine intervention.

Isaiah's words resonate with the longing for God's presence in the lives of many of the world’s citizens and communities in our world. Amid trials and tribulations, we too cry out for God to make His presence known. This prayer aligns with the Advent spirit, as we yearn for the Emmanuel, the God who is with us, to draw near and bring comfort to our troubled hearts.

We didn’t use the traditional Prayer of the Day, opting for the Prayer of the Day from the Candle Lighting Ceremony, but the traditional Prayer of the Day for the First Sunday of Advent begins, “Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come.” Do you hear the urgency and anticipation?

You’ve all heard the story of the “The Drowning Man,” but on the odd chance that you haven’t, allow me to tell it to you.

A fellow was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help.
Soon a man in a rowboat came by and the fellow shouted to the man on the roof, “Jump in, I can save you.”
The stranded fellow shouted back, “No, it’s OK, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me.”
So the rowboat went on.
Then a motorboat came by. “The fellow in the motorboat shouted, “Jump in, I can save you.”
To this, the stranded man said, “No thanks, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith.”
So the motorboat went on.
Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, “Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety.”
To this, the stranded man again replied, “No thanks, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith.”
So the helicopter reluctantly flew away.
Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to Heaven. He finally got his chance to discuss this whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, “I had faith in you but you didn’t save me, you let me drown. I don’t understand why!”
To this God replied, “I sent you a rowboat and a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?”

Now while that is probably a fictional story, it is born out in truth. Case in point, the Israelites.

* Back in Egypt when God heard the groans of His people, God sent Moses.
* Then God sent the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph and the Israelites didn’t listen.
* Then God sent the Judges and Kings and the Israelites didn’t listen.
* Then God sent the Prophets and the Israelites didn’t listen.
* Seeing that the people weren’t going to change God sent his own Son, Jesus, and they wouldn’t listen to him either. So God used His nuclear option, He sacrificed His own Son for the sins of the world – even if they don’t acknowledge it.

Do you see a pattern here?

Carol and I pray for peace in the Middle East at every meal. She said of those Palestinians and Jews who want to eliminate each other, “They need Jesus!” Three little words – and she is so right. Isaiah was right when he said,

***9c“we are all your people***.”

Christians don’t always get it right, but we know we have Jesus, and with him comes love, grace, and mercy. Because we have been forgiven, we can forgive others.

In Gospel Reading from Mark, Jesus paints a vivid picture of cosmic upheaval and heavenly signs heralding his triumphant return.

24“In those days, after that suffering,
 the sun will be darkened,
  and the moon will not give its light,
 25and the stars will be falling from heaven,
  and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”

These chaotic cosmic images may seem daunting, but embedded within them is a profound message of hope. They signify not only the culmination of God's redemptive plan but also the assurance of Christ's return as the victorious King. Amid chaos, our Lord promises to gather his chosen ones from the ends of the earth. This promise echoes Isaiah's cry for divine intervention, and in this, we find hope.

Jesus, in his wisdom, reminds us that while we do not know the exact hour of his return, we are called to remain watchful.

As we wait for the advent of our Lord, we are called to cultivate a *spirit of watchfulness*. This is not a passive waiting but an active anticipation that involves living with purpose, righteousness, and an eagerness to fulfill God's will. Advent is a season of introspection, prompting us to examine our hearts, repent of our shortcomings, and renew our commitment to a life that reflects the love, grace, and mercy of God taught by the example of his Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As we navigate through the Advent season, we realize it is a time of dual waiting - waiting for the celebration of the birth of Christ (His First Advent) and waiting for his promised return (His Second Advent).

In this dual waiting, we find a rhythm that echoes the ebb and flow of life itself. We wait with joy and anticipation for the birth of the Christ child, acknowledging the profound impact of his First Coming. And simultaneously, we wait with hope and expectation for his Second Coming, trusting in the fulfillment of God's promises.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

As we embark on this Advent journey, let us be people of hope. The cosmic signs remind us that, even amid turmoil, God's redemptive plan is unfolding. The call to watchfulness challenges us to live with purpose and anticipation, actively seeking God in our daily lives. The cry of Isaiah resonates with our longings, prompting us to bring our desires for God's presence into our prayers.

As we wait for the advent of our Lord, let us be a people marked by hope, watchfulness, and a fervent desire for God's presence. May this Advent season be a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal, as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Christ and eagerly await his glorious return.

**Prayer**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen