

Sermon for Advent 1
Bethany Lutheran Church

Isaiah 64:1-9
psalm 80
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

“O that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains may quake at Your presence – as when a fire kindles brushwood and fire causes water to boil. To make Your name known to Your adversaries, and that they might tremble at Your presence.”

Have you ever prayed that prayer before? Oh, yes I would like to God come down and clean up the mess that this world, this nation, this state, this community is in. To straighten things out. To make right everything that is wrong. To put fear into the hearts of those who trouble us, be they corrupt politicians, drug dealers, sex traffickers – that they may tremble at God's presence – and repent! And Stop!

The prophet sounds pretty desperate. And maybe each one of us has been desperate too and prayed such a prayer. There times I must confess that I would love for God to do something dramatic, like with one stroke of the arm wipe away this Corona Virus so we can return to normal. To act so that politicians can see that there is really a God and that they cannot get away with what they are doing. Show up God and make them shake in their boots! Tremble at your presence. To send fire and brimstone on the all the evil people in this world.

The Prophet is praying a rather bold prayer. Show us the awesome things you did before. And God can do this! He can preach and do fire and brimstone like no one else. He did it to Sodom and Gomorrah, At Mt. Sinai in the giving of His Law. And people below were filled with fear. Yes, Lord we will do what you say. The fear of the Lord can do that! It can straighten a bad person out. That will certainly fix things.

That is what we prayed this morning in the prayer of the day. “Stir up your power and come, O Lord and rescue us from the the threatening perils of our sins. “

That sounds pretty good. Up to this point Isaiah and we have pointed to all the targets of God's Coming down on. It is “Them, They, and Those People,”

But, Wait! Did you pick that little phrase, “rescue us from the perils of our sins,” my sins. We are part of the mess that we pray for God to rend the heavens and come down on and fix.

Yes, the Prophet catches us pointing our finger at others. But as someone once said, when you point your finger at something to blame, remember there are three pointing right back at you.

“Behold you were angry. And WE sinned. And in our sins we have been in a long time.” In this part of the reading there are no 2nd or 3rd person pronouns. Isaiah gets personal. “We all have become like one who is unclean. All our righteous deeds are a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf. And our iniquities take us away like the wind. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. For you hidden your face from us and made us melt in the hands of our iniquities.” The prayer that Isaiah prayers is not directed to our enemies, The target of God's heaven rending is that big X on my chest. Your chest.

There are three ways we can respond. We say, that is most certainly true. For we know the human condition. We are sinners and cannot free ourselves. We need God to pull us out of the mess we have gotten into. Isaiah here is not asking God to give us 10 commandments for a happy and joyful life, if we just follow them that will fix life, marriage and family.

We have all become like one who is unclean. Have you ever bought the perfect looking apple and taken a bite and discovered that there was a worm inside? All beautiful on the outside, but rotten inside. That makes our efforts to save ourselves a delusion.

Detrich Bonhoeffer wrote in His letters from prison, "We are dependent on the fact that the door to freedom needs to be opened from the outside." That about sums up what Advent is all about. Our focus on prayer, our hope, is on the one who comes down from heaven to open the door to freedom from the outside. Stir up your power and come and rescue us from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by your mighty deliverance.

The door is not opened from the inside. This leads to the second response. We ask God to come down and show us his power that makes the mountains quake, the wood ignite into a blaze and the water boil. A grand demonstration of His power can fix things. We are often tempted to think that a demonstration of God's power or a sign will turn evil around or even me around. Give me sign and I will believe. If there is a sign I get straighten out for a short bit and with two weeks things return to normal.

But God does not answer prayer that way with a grand sign. But a rather humble sign. He rends the heavens and sends His own Son into the world to be born of woman in a back water town of Bethlehem. He rends the heaven and sends His HS upon upon His beloved son at His baptism. This Jesus is the one who has come to open the door from the outside, He came to usher the Kingdom of God. Through His teaching, preaching healing, and lastly He enters Jerusalem on a donkey in humility and with a hammer that pierce his hands and feet and lifted up on a cross. He prays, Not for the Father to rend the heavens to show enemies, instead "Father Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." It is not in the power of God's powerful acts to change us and open for us the prison door of our sins, it is the power of Jesus' love for you and me that does this. His coming down from heaven to be with us. He died, was raised from the dead and He ascended into Heaven. He all this son that each one you can be His own and live under him in innocence and blessed until he comes again.

This Advent reminds that our Lord has rend the heavens and come down. He does with every baptism. Every Communion. Every time we gather in His name with two or three for prayer, worship, or study. All this – these humble means of God's grace to – Word, baptism, Holy Communion, Prayer, - To open the door and set you free.

The last thing as our gospel reminds us this morning. The day will come when for that final time, God will rend the heavens and come down, in glory and and with the angels. Then every eye will see Him and every knee will bend and confess Jesus as Lord who has rescued us from the threatening perils of our sins, and saved us by His mighty deliverance.

Until we wait and pray, "Now, Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay. And you are our potter. We are the work of Your hand. Be not so terribly angry, And remember not our iniquity forever. Behold we are your people. Amen.