

Lectionary Reflection – Advent 1, Year B

November 29, 2020

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Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

Isaiah 64:1-9

The prophet begins with an impassioned plea and a lament. From a historical perspective, Israel is in the throes of the Babylonian exile and laments what it perceives to be the absence of God. What the people desire is an immediate, radical entrance of God on the scene. “Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down!” They remind God by way of their own remembering that there was a time when he broke into their world radically to deliver them from bondage. They desire a similar entrance in this context. But for some reason, such an appearance of God is not forthcoming and they lament his hiddenness. They acknowledge their own sinfulness and are even willing to entertain the idea that God is absent because of this sinfulness; and yet, it is not entirely clear which came first – the chicken or the egg? Is God absent because Israel sinned, or did Israel sin because God is absent? These two realities are intertwined and cannot seem to be untangled. Israel cannot bear the absence of God and implores him to remember that they are his people and that they are willing to be the work of His hands, like clay submits to a potter. The lament ends more gently than it began...children coming to their Father begging Him to receive them...clay becoming compliant on the wheel... rather than having Him tear open the heavens and come down.

How many of us have not experienced times when God seems starkly absent? Can we not relate to the prophet’s impassioned plea that God would simply rend the skies asunder and step dramatically into our worlds to save us? Where is God absent in your life? Do you find yourself confused, wondering if God is absent because you wandered away or if you wandered away because God seemed absent? Perhaps we all might benefit from writing a prayer to God in which we submit to Him as clay to be molded and shaped to His liking. Perhaps we can do our own reminding of God (and ourselves!) that we are His people and belong to Him?

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

This prayer is the prayer of those who know that they belong to God. They have perhaps strayed from the ways of God and recognize that God might be angry, but they implore God to return to them. “Restore us O God of hosts, let your face shine that we might be saved.” Twice this refrain is sounded. Israel continues to remind God that they are His people and that even though their behavior sometimes speaks differently, they desperately need Him.

Sometimes I think we lose sight of just how desperately we need our Creator. Psalms like these remind us that we too belong to a Creator and even though He might seem absent from us, or we from Him, it is good to be reminded of our connection. What are all the ways that you need God?

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

For people engaged in Advent waiting, this encouragement from the Apostle Paul is timely. We are waiting for a very present God who yet seems not here. The reminder that we have been enriched with knowledge, strength, speech and spiritual gifts of every kind is timely indeed! Our waiting will not be in vain. We will be blameless on the day of the Lord's coming. Our task now is to wait watchfully and to participate in the fellowship of Jesus.

Who is your parish family? How can you participate in fellowship with them as you wait? When you join your spiritual gifts with theirs, the waiting becomes doable. Your gifts alone are impressive; but combined with those whom God has given you as your parish family, you now have the capability to wait in power. Spend some time in prayer with thanking God for brother and sister Christians that he has placed in your life.

Mark 13:24-37

In staff meeting on Tuesday morning, we normally reflect as a group on the Gospel lesson appointed for the following Sunday. Leah, the Bishop's Executive Secretary, told us about a fig tree in her yard. As changes happen to this tree, they happen immediately. She described that the tree would be stark, but when leaves came, they seem to come suddenly and at once. Likewise, when the trees fell in the fall, while other trees would lose their leaves gradually, the fig tree would lose its leaves immediately, at once. When figs became ripe and ready for harvest, this happened all at once...an abundance of figs ready for jam and chutney all within the span of about a week! The Gospel writer reminds us that as we wait, changes can happen immediately. We are exhorted to consider the fig tree and how quickly it experiences change. Advent waiting is like that. We can be watching and think that nothing is ever going to happen, but the coming of the Lord will be immediate and all at once. Even though God seems absent now...even though the lights in the sky, the moon, stars and sun, don't illuminate the presence of the Lord for us now, this can and will change immediately. We must keep waiting and watching.

For what are you waiting? For what change in your life are you watching? We of course have no control over how quickly God comes to us. But we do know that He will come and perhaps all at once. In what practices can we engage that will strengthen our waiting and watching. Many find it helpful during Advent to engage in extra Scripture reading, extra times of prayer, extra acts of charity and service. What can you do to strengthen you in your watching so that when the Lord comes all at once, you will be ready?

COLLECT:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.