

**Isaiah 64:1-9**

First Sunday in Advent (Series B)

**Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 64:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 11:1-10**

**Come, Lord Jesus!**

December 3, 2017

*“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— 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! When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From 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. You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. 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. 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. But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people.”* (Isaiah 64:1-9, ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

*Come Lord Jesus be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed; and may there be a goodly share on every table everywhere.* I'm sure that most of you recognize the first part of that prayer. It is known, at least in Lutheran circles, as *The Common Table Prayer*. The second part is something we use in our home, and which I've taught our staff. It comes from a Slovak background, and reminds us that even as we are grateful for what God has provided for us, we also pray that all would know His providing care. But it is the first part of that prayer which fits so well with the message of Advent, specifically the words, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Those words have always been one of the simplest, and yet most fervent prayers of the church. We see that in the last words of Scripture, recorded in the book of Revelation. The apostle John, having seen his vision of the ongoing struggle in this world between the devil's wickedness and God's perfect holiness; and also seeing the glory of God's victory over evil, concludes his epistle with that prayer, *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22:20, ESV)

Throughout the centuries the church has longed for God's glory and salvation to be revealed. God's people have always known the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. His coming again in glory will bring us life in its fullness, a life of joy and peace and wonder beyond anything we can even begin to imagine. And so we pray: Come, Lord Jesus. Paul uses an Aramaic expression, *marana tha*, often shortened to *“maranatha”*, which means, ‘come, O Lord’. This single word came to be as important to the early church as our use of *alleluia* or *hosanna* in our worship. Come Lord Jesus. Particularly during Advent, the focus was on that prayer. In fact, a series of antiphons or short prayers, traditionally known as the “O” antiphons were written, each with a different focus on the Christ who will come again. What is probably the best known Advent hymn, *“Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel”* is based on these “O” antiphons.

During this Advent season we join in those ancient prayers of the church as we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus”, and in the words of the last of those antiphons we begin this new church year, as we pray, Come Lord Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel: God with us.

The well-known poem *“Footprints in the Sand”*, tells of a dream, where a man is walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the skies flashed scenes from his life. He sees the two sets of footprints in the sand—his and the Lord's. But he noticed that at the lowest and saddest times of his life there was only one set of footprints. He asked the Lord about it: I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me.” The Lord replied, “My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.” I believe that the reason “Footprints” has been so popular is that wonderful image of our God standing right beside us as we journey through life, but also because it comforts us to know that He carries us through the darkest and most difficult times of our lives.

Isn't that exactly why we pray “Come, Lord Jesus”? Come, O Lord and be with us. Come quickly to help us. In our text today, Isaiah, says *Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— 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 cries out to God to come and rescue His people. He has, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, foreseen the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming Babylonian captivity. There are dark, dark days ahead. Isaiah

prophesies and says: ***“our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.”*** (Isaiah 63:18, ESV) ***“Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins.”*** (Isaiah 64:11, ESV) Lord, we need you! O Come, O Come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel!

We haven't had that same struggle—yet. We cannot deny, however, that Christianity is under attack all the time in our world today. We have noted before that many are suffering and dying for their faith. For us, it is simply getting harder and harder to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. We don't fit in. We are ridiculed for our beliefs which are—and which should be—so out of step with the world. Earlier in this prophecy, God calls Isaiah to proclaim: ***“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”*** (Isaiah 5:20, ESV) That is what our world does, and when we point out the confusion, we are hated and despised. We are called hypocrites (which we are, at times). We are called intolerant. Maybe that is why so many Christians choose to be friends with the world, and just ‘go along’ with the worldly ideas of right and wrong.

Even if we aren't being persecuted, we still need God to be with us. Peter tells us: ***“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*** (1 Peter 5:8, ESV) The devil just loves to bring hardship, disappointment and struggle into our lives. He goes out of his way to make this earthly existence miserable, and it seems that he does that moreso in the lives of Christians than in the lives of unbelievers. When we feel the pains of our bodies; when we feel overwhelmed by the cares of life; when we feel that God has forgotten us our prayer is “Come, Lord Jesus.” Come to be with us. Come explain what is happening around us. Come and assure us that everything is going to be alright.

But why should our God want to come to us? When we look at our text, Isaiah makes one thing clear. He says: ***Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?*** It's that ugly little reality of sin that gets in the way, and we do continue to sin. Our thoughts, actions and attitudes are far from the holiness and righteousness that God has the right to expect of the people He has created and blessed so richly. Isaiah is right on the money when he says: ***We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*** It hurts, doesn't it, to know that even the good things we think we do are filthy before the perfect holiness of our God. Isaiah asks: ***shall we be saved?*** Can we be saved? We need to be saved!

Thankfully, God Himself takes care of our salvation. He does rend the heavens and come down to us. The eternal Son takes on human flesh and blood and is born of a virgin mother. He, who is holy and sinless, lives among sinners, and fulfills His mission as He dies on the cross in our place. He is the One who came to answer the simple prayer of the people on that road leading to Jerusalem; the people who cried out, “Hosanna!” “Save us, we pray”. Emmanuel comes to us and takes our filthiness on Himself so that He may clothe us in His righteousness. And the mountains tremble before Him as He bursts forth from that tomb, living to be the life, the help and strength of His people, and to bring us into eternal life.

We pray, Come Lord Jesus. You, our God, come and be with us! That prayer was answered when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah. It was answered as He rode on that donkey colt to Jerusalem. It was answered as He dies on the cross, and as He rises on the third day. It is answered when we hear His Word or read our bibles, God is with us. He is there in every syllable of His revealed truth. When we come to the Lord's table to commune, Christ is with us—physically present to bring His body and blood for the forgiveness and strength of His people. Moses says: ***“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?”*** (Deuteronomy 4:7, ESV) In our Baptism, God, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us as the temple of the Lord, bringing us the fulness of all things Christ has done for us. And the Saviour who came to die and rise for us promises: ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*** (Hebrews 13:5, ESV)

In the musical, “Fiddler on the Roof,” there is a song which says: ***“When Messiah comes he will say to us, I apologize I took so long but I had a little trouble finding you over here a few and over there a few, you were hard to reunite, but everything is going to be all right.”*** The mood of that song is the mood of Isaiah in our text, ***Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!*** Isaiah knew that God's presence with His people makes all the difference. When God is with us we need not fear any enemies of body or soul. When God is with us the devil has no power over us. The wonderful good news is that Messiah has come. God is with us and abides with us and cares for us. The day is also drawing near when He will come again, and when He does, He will do more than simply be with us. He will take us to be with Him in the glory of His kingdom, to enjoy the blessings of His victory over evil, forevermore. Come, Lord Jesus, bring us to the glory of that day. Amen.