

Come, Lord Jesus

Isaiah 64:1-9

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An eight year old boy was asked by his mother what he learned in Sunday school class. “Well mom, our teacher told how God sent Moses on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a bridge and all the people walked across safely. He used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an airstrike. He sent bombers in to blow up the bridge and the all the Israelites were saved.” His mother asked, “Is that really what she taught you?” He was quiet for a moment, and then said, “No, but if I told you what she really taught me, you would never believe it.”

The humor in that story is exactly what it says. The story of what God really did in Israel is unbelievable. Or at least it is unbelievable in terms of what we normally experience. The stories in Exodus come to us not as normal events that play out in time, but rather miraculous events, events filled with signs and wonders, events that demonstrate God’s divine intervention. What really happened in Exodus? Signs and wonders were on dramatic display as God sent plagues, as locusts and gnats and frogs and flies filled the air, boils broke out, and darkness enveloped the land. The mighty right hand of God separated the waters of the Red Sea and Israel walked through on dry land. Exodus tells of a God who rolls up his sleeves and rocks this world through divine intervention.

That’s what the prophet Isaiah wants to see. Show me some of that power. Show me some of that might. “Oh, God, that you would rend the heavens and come down.” Although he asks that the mountains would tremble, what he really wants is for his enemies, and the enemies of Israel, to quake in their boots. This world is going to hell in a hand basket, and frankly, Isaiah is worn out with waiting. God, get busy! Rend the heavens! Come down. Right here and right now! Isaiah is not asking for any new fangled stuff like bridges and walkie-talkies, no airstrikes and bombers. He wants God to do it the old fashioned way. He wants the raging waters that flooded the land in the days of Noah. He’s been raised on stories of burning sulfur raining down on Sodom and Gomorrah. He would be satisfied if the earth opened its wide mouth and swallowed those sinful and rebellious enemies. The old prophet would clap with glee if God sent a ball of fire that burned his rivals to a crisp.

Isaiah gets one thing right about Advent. Advent is a season where we admit we are worn out with the ways of the world. We are so worn out we don't want any slow and steady justice that's meted out in tiny measures and careful corrections. By the time we come to Advent we want God to fix this mess of a world, and we want it...now. "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down."

Actually, Isaiah gets two things right about Advent. After he vents about how tired he is of the sinful ways of the enemies and rivals and surrounding nations, he eventually takes a look at himself...and his own people. It turns out Isaiah really believes God comes to the help of his people, to the ones who do right and remember God's ways. But the painful truth he admits is that Israel, all of Israel, including Isaiah has sinned against God. They are all deserving of God's anger. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." We failed. We missed the mark. And so Advent is not just recognizing others have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Advent is our time to own up that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Advent is our time to confess that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Recognizing that everyone deserves judgment, including Israel, including Isaiah, this leads to quite a different plea by the end of the verses we are looking at this morning. When it was the enemies, the rivals, the other nations, the plea was "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down." Now that Isaiah and Israel are also part of the judgment, the cry is for a softer and gentler entry into the world. "You, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people."

Where Isaiah ends up is not a bad place to be as we begin Advent. He called out the other nations. Then he called out Israel. He called out himself. As he called out he was pleading with God to rend the heavens and come down. He still wants God to come down. Where would we be if God did not rend the heavens and come down? We would be alone. We would be lost. We would be stuck. Isaiah still wants the Lord to rend the heavens and come down. But God, you are our Father. Would you come gently? Would you come with kindness? Would you come with mercy? Oh, God, when you rend the heavens, would you come with love. As we enter this season of Advent, hear the good news:

- **For God so loved the world, when he rent the heavens he did not call out an airstrike on a walkie-talkie, sending in the bomber jet planes.**
- **For God so loved the world, when he rent the heavens he did not send a flood to wash away all human inhabitants.**
- **For God so loved the world, when he rent the heavens he did make his entry with burning sulfur...he did not open the earth and swallow up all the rebels...he did not send a ball of fire to consume the idolatry and worship of false gods.**
- **I'm guessing you know what God did. For God so loved the world he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**

I'm also guessing that is why you are here today. You have taken a good look at the world, a world that is presented to us by the media 24/7, a constant barrage of how broken this world is. But that's not all. My guess is you have taken a good hard look at yourself, and you realize your life hasn't measured up completely to what God wants. Maybe you have even looked at your life and seen ways you have failed, perhaps spectacularly. But most importantly, I'm guessing you have cast your lot with the God who rent the heavens and sent his one and only Son, his Beloved Son, to bring salvation to this broken world.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, and you heard the words shared as we lit the candle of hope. I hope that this morning you and I can understand the miracle of how God rent the heavens when he sent Jesus. I hope you and I can embrace the miracle of how God rent the heavens when he sent Jesus. He came as a human. More than that, the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us how he came as a baby. The gospels have plenty of stories about the power that Jesus had. He healed, he multiplied loaves, he walked on the water, he turned water to wine. All those spectacular things drew big crowds. But they didn't build disciples. What Jesus did in humility, with gentleness, as a servant, as a suffering servant, those things, those things did not draw the big crowds. And yet it was those very things that he said would bring life. It was those very things that would build disciples. If you want to save your life you will lose it. But if you lose your life for my sake, for my kingdom, if you seek greatness through the path of being a servant, if you lay down your life for others, if you embrace the call to reach out to the least of these, then you will find life.

When I was first working in a church, and everything was new to me, and everything I saw I had never seen before, there was an old house where a bunch of us who were working with youth shared an office. The walls of that old house were filled with posters and signs. The one that caught my attention,

and the one that I still see clearly to this day was a decoupage picture of a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. It said, “Jesus Christ invites you to a dinner in his honor.” When God rent the heavens, he sat at a table with friends that he loved, friends he loved even though he knew they would betray and deny him, and he took bread and said, “This is my body, given for you.” He poured the cup saying, “This is my blood, shed for you.” When God rent the heavens, he did not impose his will on us. He did not destroy us with a fire or a flood. He offered himself to us. He offered himself for us.

There is a book with an intriguing title. *Kneeling in Bethlehem* is written by Ann Weems. The title not only invites us in this Advent season to come to Bethlehem, it tells us the appropriate posture to approach our Servant King. The appropriate posture is kneeling. Bethlehem is a place for wonder and awe. Wise men bow their knee in Bethlehem, worshipping the newborn King. Shepherds leave their flocks so they can bow their knee. Kneeling in Bethlehem is the ultimate goal of Advent. We are drawn back to that ancient manger that holds the key to everlasting life. O come let us adore him, for he is Christ the Lord. We come with humility, bowing down and bending our knee in reverence of the God whose love for this world is so great he would send his Beloved Son.

Kneeling in Bethlehem took on a new meaning in November of 2011. We were with a group that actually visited Bethlehem. The entrance to the Church of the Nativity practically forces you to kneel. It is a small door, so small even our tiniest member had to crouch down to enter. How perfect is that? Somewhere I read they even call the door *The Door of Humility*. Nice.

As we draw near to Christmas, my earnest prayer is that we would all be drawn to enter through the door of humility. My prayer is that we would all bow down and crouch low to enter the presence of our Lord. My prayer is that we would all be found in Bethlehem, and found kneeling. What does that mean? That we would all bow down in our heart of hearts and worship Christ the newborn King.

Listen to one of the poems from the book with that beautiful title, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*.

“Each year the Child is born again. Each year some new heart finally hears, finally sees, finally knows love. And in heaven there is great rejoicing! There is a festival of stars! There is a celebration among the angels! For in the finding of one lost sheep, the heart of the Shepherd is glad, and Christmas has happened once more. The Child is born anew and one more knee is bowed!”

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down. He did. God did. He came to Bethlehem. “O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. But in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” Come, Lord Jesus. Your people are waiting. We are in Bethlehem. And we are kneeling. Come, Lord Jesus.