

**Advent Midweek 2 • December 12, 2012**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

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Isaiah 64:1-9

“Prayers of Advent: Isaiah”

When? When is God going to step in?

That's the prophet Isaiah's question in our reading today. He's looking for an answer. The people for whom he pleads — God's people — would have been in exile in Babylon, away from their homeland for decade upon decade. This period of exile followed centuries of God calling the people of Israel and Judah through the prophets, calling them to turn from sin and to return to being the people He intended them to be. They didn't, though, and the long-promised judgment came upon them. God allowed Israel and Judah to fall before the might of the great empires of that time. Their great cities were destroyed by invading armies. Even the temple in Jerusalem was reduced to rubble, the pride of the nation laid to waste. The people were taken captive and resettled in a foreign land, far from the once-Promised Land that was very much part of their identity. And there they waited. They knew that God could act to bring deliverance. He had done it in the past — most of the time when they weren't even expecting it! But now they languish in exile. When is the Lord going to come to His people's aid and do something about the situation? When is God going to step in?

That might be your question today, too. Do you want God to step in and repair your relationships? Sometimes it can feel like you're in exile from the people with whom you'd once been close, maybe even people who live under the same roof. Are you wondering when God would act to bring deliverance from financial distress? That's a pressure that an increasing number of households are feeling in our area, one that can leave you overwhelmed. Perhaps you're asking why God doesn't just break in to our world and bring an end to crime and poverty and disease and conflict? These problems aren't getting any better, and in our always-connected world it seems like we experience more and more of them. When is God going to step in?

Isaiah longed for **divine disruption**. His call to the Lord is a prayer of advent, looking for God to step in and act. When the prophet prays, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,” he knows that God could do just that — and more. God could explosively break into His creation, cleaving the sky in two as He comes in might and majesty, shaking even the mountains to the ground, but Isaiah is calling for God to go beyond that. He is praying for God to come and save His people. Other so-called gods had long been given credit for things like earthquakes or phenomena in the heavens, but only Yahweh, the one true God, can and does act to save. When God breaks in, the world changes.

In this time of Advent, God's people are again looking to Him for **divine disruption**. And while God does hear and respond to your prayers for His intervention in the concerns of this life, our Advent prayer addresses the most pressing concern we could have: for God to come and deliver us from exile.

God broke in on the bad situation that was His people's exile in Babylon, giving that empire into the hands of Cyrus king of Persia. The world changed. Acting as God's agent, Cyrus released the people of Judah from exile so that they could return to the land from which they'd been evicted. They could rebuild the Lord's temple and come together once again to be the people that they were meant to be, a witness to the nations, proclaiming God's love and faithfulness.

God broke in on the bad situation that was humanity's slavery to sin, stepping in as God the Son became flesh-and-blood in Jesus the Messiah. The Lord split the heavens that night in Bethlehem as the angel choirs sang out “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!” A few decades later, the earth shook and the sky darkened as that same Jesus gave up his life on the cross, God acting to save you and me and all people. The world changed. God fulfilled His promise to save. Isaiah spoke the truth: nothing else but God's direct intervention can break the power of the people's sin. Even our most righteous deeds are — as the prophet graphically expresses it — like a used sanitary napkin, unfit to stand before God. And yet the Lord in His love still acts to save His people.

God will break in on the bad situation that is this broken world. Christ will come again and the world will be changed: he will rend the heavens and come down, bringing the ultimate restoration between God and His people. God will deliver judgment on sin and death, destroying them forever as the very foundations of the creation shake in God's majestic presence.

In these days of Advent, we are waiting for **divine disruption**. As was the case with Isaiah, our waiting isn't just a passive hanging-around until the Lord comes with that might and majesty that rends the heavens: when we hear of God acting "for those who wait for Him," that's active waiting. That's trust that commits itself to God over the long haul, knowing that He alone can —and will— save.

Active waiting, trusting in God, is living that remembers God's ways. What needs to be divinely disrupted in your life as you wait for God to step in on that final day? What change are you needing in these days as look ahead to Christ's coming? God alone comes to His people's aid to bring deliverance. The Holy Spirit can make that change happen. The Spirit does will not destroy you as fire burning brushwood or boiling water, yet His presence brings the fire that will fuel your work as a witness even as He will change your world within and without.

This Advent, as you pray to the Lord with Isaiah, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down," know that He will answer your prayer. And for that great day we wait.

**Amen.**