

Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent

“Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance.” (Collect for the Day)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Contrary to popular belief, Advent is not a season of preparation for Christmas. During this first season of the new Church Year, we are not “looking forward” to the Nativity of Christ and His incarnation... For these events have already taken place, right? We’ve been there and done that and got the souvenir Nativity Set to attest to it!

So Advent should not be thought of as a preparation for Christmas alone, but a season to prepare for our Lord’s coming in judgment when He will bring this world to a smoldering end. Today we prepare for that Day when “the sun will be darkened, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Mat 24:30) – that Day when all the nations of the earth will mourn and cry out in terror as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And so we join with Isaiah in praying, “Oh that you *would* rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence... that the nations might tremble...” (Isa 64:1-2), especially in these last days of plague and uncertainty, political oppression against the Church, and overall bad behavior by those in the world around us.

Indeed, we cry out, “Hosanna!” which means, “Lord, Save us!” Save us by Your mighty deliverance. Rend the heavens and come down! Get ‘er done already – because we’re ready!

Or are we? Are we *really* ready...? We may think so. As regimes in our land continue to clamp down on the church, prohibiting gatherings of more than ten people, even outlawing the singing of hymns and the reciting of Creeds while it remains standing room only at Walmart and Lowe's; as lawmakers threaten our religious liberties and our right to uphold God's Word regarding marriage and family and Biblical manhood and womanhood; as those who call themselves Christians conform the church to this world and gut Christianity of its truth, we readily pray, "Rend the heavens and come down!" Indeed, as those in our own neighborhood, classroom, or workplace mistreat us, hurt us, or destroy our reputation by malicious gossip, we readily lift up our heads, shake our fists, and cry out, "This would be a good time, O Lord - Bring Your justice; bring Your vengeance; bring Your fiery wrath and put things right. Rend the heavens and come down!"

The only problem is, if the Lord were indeed to "rend the heavens" and do away with everything vile and broken and sinful and unclean, then you and I would be toast. For as Isaiah goes on to point out, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." Our daily lives are largely informed and guided by our self-sufficiency - our ongoing idolatry, or as Isaiah writes, "there is no one who calls upon Your Name, who rouses himself to take hold of you" (Isa 64:7) - none who order their lives in obedience to God's Word and who have not given in to the self-serving, self-justifying, self-guiding mindset of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh.

The fact is, we are all as much a part of the problem in this fallen world as everybody else, and so "We ALL fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Isa 64:6)... From the dust you came, and to the dust you shall return. And there is a reason for this - a reason we "*get to*" suffer pain and disease and hardship and tears and grief and loss all the way to death... It's called the curse, and it was *given* to us - *gifted* to us by God to *show* us our condition and to point us to our need for rescue from the threatening perils of our sins. For without God's rescue from sin, there can be no deliverance from His wrath. If we were not made aware of

our own brokenness and our helplessness to mend or redeem ourselves – if we were not shown our true sinful nature and our need for cleansing and renewal, then we would not repent, and we would not seek the rescue God so graciously desires

for us. The truth is, God *wants* you saved from your sin that you may not suffer His wrath on the Last Day. “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the LORD, “but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Eze 33:11).

Which brings us to Advent. For God is coming – the Day of the Lord is coming. And if we are to meet Him rightly when He comes so that we are gathered into His kingdom rather than destroyed by His wrath, then we must be prepared – we must be changed, NOT by what we can do for ourselves, but by what our Lord Jesus Christ comes here today to do for us.

Today we pray, “Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins...”

Rather

than calling down God’s wrath and judgment upon ourselves, we repent and come to the same realization as Isaiah who prays, “O LORD, You are our potter, we are the clay.” Remold us; remake us; forgive us, renew us, and lead us. “Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever” (Isa 64:8-9).

Forgive

us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and deliver us from evil. Which is exactly what He does...

For today, that very prayer is answered, not by the rending of heavens or the quaking of mountains, but by our Lord Jesus Christ who comes in mercy to prepare us, to bind up our wounds, to take away our sins and to clothe us in His righteousness, that we may stand on that Great Day when He comes again in judgment. In the same way that He once came hidden under flesh and blood, riding a donkey on a journey that would end at the cross where He would take away our sin, He comes for us today, hidden under bread and wine to take away our sin and make us anew. During Advent, and every Lord’s Day for that matter, Jesus comes to us with His gifts that prepare us for that Day when He will come, not on a donkey, not hidden under bread and wine, but riding on the clouds of heaven in the fullness of His glory to judge the living and the dead. And as we stand before Him on this day, crying out with all the faithful before the throne of

grace, “Hosanna, Lord, Save Us” – as we receive Him who comes in the Name of the Lord with His gifts for our forgiveness, life, and salvation, our prayer is answered, and we are indeed rescued from the threatening perils of our sin so that we may be saved by His mighty deliverance.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 11:1-10.