

Isaiah 64:1-9  
December 3, '17

“THOSE WHO WAIT”

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING COMES FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET THAT WE’RE ACCUSTOMED TO HEARING DURING ADVENT – THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

ORDINARILY, THOUGH, WHEN WE HEAR THE VOICE OF ISAIAH DURING ADVENT, WE HEAR WORDS LIKE, “*THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT,*” FROM ISAIAH 9 OR “*A SHOOT SHALL COME OUT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE...*” FROM CHAPTER 11 (THAT PASSAGE ALSO BEING A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE THEME OF THIS YEAR’S ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK).

THIS MORNING, THOUGH, WE’LL BE LOOKING AT A PASSAGE THAT ISN’T QUITE AS FAMILIAR – ESPECIALLY AS WE CONSIDER A CONNECTION TO OUR CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

IT’S FOUND IN THE 64<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER, VERSES 1-9.

ISAIAH 64:1-9.

HOW OFTEN DO WE HEAR SOMEONE SAY, “*IF ONLY GOD WOULD DO THE THINGS TODAY THAT HE DID BACK IN BIBLE TIMES, I’D BE A BELIEVER.*”

PERHAPS YOU’VE HAD THE SAME THOUGHT YOURSELF – NOT THAT YOU NEED THOSE THINGS TO BE A BELIEVER, BUT IT SURE WOULD MAKE IT *EASIER* TO BELIEVE, WOULDN’T IT?

DON’T YOU FIND IT AMAZING THEN, THAT ISAIAH, WRITING IN VIRTUALLY THE MIDDLE OF THE BIBLE & IN THE MIDDLE OF WHAT WE THINK OF AS “BIBLE TIMES” IS SAYING EXACTLY THE SAME THING?!

**LOOK AT THAT OPENING VERSE – “O THAT YOU WOULD OPEN THE HEAVENS & COME DOWN, SO THAT THE MOUNTAINS WOULD SHAKE AT YOUR PRESENCE...”**

**THE PROPHET IS MAKING AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO “THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE” WHEN GOD WAS ACTIVE IN THE WORLD & DOING THINGS THAT GOD JUST ISN’T DOING ANYMORE.**

**THIS PASSAGE IS FOUND IN WHAT’S KNOWN AS “THIRD ISAIAH” – CHAPTERS 56-66, WRITTEN AS THE FIRST PEOPLE ARE RETURNING TO JERUSALEM AFTER THE BABYLONIAN EXILE.**

**THEY’VE GONE BACK TO DISCOVER THE CITY IN RUINS & THEIR HIGH HOPES FOR WHAT THEY WOULD FIND THERE HAVE BEEN SHATTERED.**

**THE PROPHET BEGS & PLEADS WITH GOD TO SHOW UP & DO SOMETHING AS HE DID IN DAYS GONE BY.**

**THE PROPHET EXPRESSES THE PROPER MOOD FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT – A MOOD OF PATIENT WAITING, MIXED TOGETHER WITH FRAGILE HOPE.**

**THE PROPHET EVEN OFFERS A LABEL FOR PEOPLE WHO LIVE LIKE THAT.**

**HE CALLS THEM – AND US – THOSE WHO WAIT.**

**WAITING IS A FAMILIAR THEM IN THE BIBLE.**

**ABRAM & SARA WERE PROMISED DESCENDANTS “AS NUMEROUS AS THE STARS,” BUT THEY HAD A LONG WAIT BEFORE THAT PROMISE WAS FULFILLED.**

**THE ISRAELITES WAITED IN SLAVERY FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE GOD RELEASED THEM IN THE EXODUS.**

**THEY WAITED IN THE WILDERNESS FOR 40 YEARS BEFORE ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND.**

**DAVID WAITED IN THE WINGS, RUNNING FROM SAUL BEFORE BEING ANOINTED AS ISRAEL'S KING.**

**AND THEN THE ENTIRE NATION WAITED IN EXILE FOR 70 YEARS BEFORE RETURNING TO THEIR HOMELAND.**

**THROUGH IT ALL – THROUGH ALL OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL – THEY WAITED FOR THE PROMISED MESSIAH WHO WOULD COME TO REDEEM THEM.**

**YES, THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE A RICH HISTORY OF BEING “THOSE WHO WAIT.”**

**WAITING IS A PART OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES AS WELL.**

**WE, TOO, ARE “THOSE WHO WAIT.”**

**WE DON'T MUCH LIKE IT, THOUGH, DO WE?**

**WE HAVE DVR'S ON OUR TELEVISION THAT RESCUE US FROM WAITING THROUGH COMMERCIALS.**

**WE WANT OUR DEVICES & OUR INTERNET TO BE A NANOSECOND FASTER TO PREVENT US FROM HAVING TO WAIT FOR A CONNECTION.**

**AMAZON PRIME PREVENTS US FROM HAVING TO WAIT MORE THAN TWO DAYS TO RECEIVE SOMETHING WE'VE ORDERED.**

**BUT “WAIT” – TWO DAYS IS YESTERDAY'S DELIVERY TIME!**

**IF YOU LIVE SOMEWHERE LIKE – SAY, INDIANAPOLIS – YOU CAN ORDER SOMETHING AT 9 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING & EXPECT IT AT YOUR DOOR AT 5 O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON!**

**YES, WE ALSO ARE “THOSE WHO WAIT” – BUT WE DON'T MUCH LIKE IT!**

**DURING THE SEASON OF ADVENT, OUR WAITING IS FOCUSED ON BOTH THE COMING OF CHRIST INTO THE WORLD AT CHRISTMAS AS WELL AS HIS COMING INTO THE WORLD AGAIN AT THE END OF TIME.**

**WE SEE THOSE WORDS OF WAITING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IN TODAY’S LECTIONARY GOSPEL FROM MARK & ON THE COVER OF OUR BULLETIN: “*THEREFORE, KEEP AWAKE...*”**

**BUT THAT TAKES US BACK TO THE OPENING WORDS OF OUR SCRIPTURE – THOSE WORDS OF THE PROPHET BEGGING GOD TO “*TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS & COME DOWN, SO THAT THE MOUNTAINS WOULD QUAKE AT YOUR PRESENCE!*”**

**WE WAIT FOR GOD, EXPECTING SOMETHING BIG, SOMETHING LOUD, SOMETHING POWERFUL, SOMETHING THAT WILL SHAKE THE EARTH WITH GOD’S UNMISTAKABLE PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST!**

**WE SEE THAT THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT TIMES – PEOPLE OF “BIBLE TIMES” – WERE NO LESS DEMANDING & DESIROUS OF THE BIG THINGS THAN WE ARE!**

**THEY, TOO, WONDERED WHY GOD WAS SILENT.**

**BUT ISAIAH GIVES US SOMETHING TO PONDER IN THE MIDST OF OUR LONGING.**

**JUST AFTER HE HAS CRIED OUT FOR SOME EARTH-SHAKING EXPRESSION OF HIS POWER & PRESENCE, HE OFFERS ONE OF THOSE BIG LITTLE WORDS THAT SO OFTEN MEAN SO MUCH IN THE BIBLE.**

**HE SAYS, “YET” OR “EVEN SO” OR “BUT NOW” – “*YET, O LORD, YOU ARE OUR FATHER; WE ARE THE CLAY & YOU ARE THE POTTER...*”**

**HE’S SAYING, “*I KNOW YOU’RE IN CHARGE, GOD. I KNOW THAT, EVEN WHEN IT DOESN’T SEEM LIKE IT OR LOOK LIKE IT OR FEEL LIKE IT, YOU’RE STILL HERE.*”**

***YOU’RE STILL WITH US & YOU CARE FOR US & YOU LOVE US.*”**

**HE’S TELLING THE PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR GOD THROUGH EVERY EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.**

**I LOVE THE STORY OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED IN EMILY DICKINSON'S HOMETOWN.**

**ONE EVENING AT DINNERTIME, THE FIRE BELL BEGAN RINGING MADLY.**

**ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE LITTLE TOWN CAME RUNNING OUT, LOOKING FOR THE FIRE.**

**THERE STOOD EMILY DICKINSON'S FATHER.**

**HE HAD JUST SEEN A GLORIOUS SUNSET & HE DIDN'T WANT ANYONE TO MISS IT SO HE RANG THE FIRE BELL TO GET EVERYONE'S ATTENTION BEFORE THE BEAUTY HAD FADED.**

**WE LIVE IN A BEAUTIFUL & MAGNIFICENT UNIVERSE AND IF WE WILL BUT OPEN OUR EYES, OUR EARS & OUR HEART, WE CAN EXPERIENCE GOD'S THUNDERING PRESENCE IN EVEN THE SOFTEST SILENCE.**

**WHAT BETTER EXAMPLE DO WE HAVE THAN THE EVENT TOWARD WHICH THE SEASON OF ADVENT POINTS US – THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN BETHLEHEM.**

**HOW MUCH MORE SUBDUED, OBSCURE & SILENT COULD THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD BE THAN THAT!?**

**THIS WORD OF HOPE FROM ISAIAH CALLS US TO BE OPEN TO GOD'S PRESENCE IN EVERY MOMENT OF OUR LIVES.**

**BUT PERHAPS THERE IS AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR "THOSE WHO WAIT" THAT CAN BE FOUND IN THE PROPHET'S WORDS THAT WE'VE READ TODAY.**

**IT'S A MESSAGE OF INCLUSION – A MESSAGE OF UNIVERSALITY.**

**ADVENT IS OUR SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN OBSERVANCE THAT LEADS TO OUR SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS.**

**BUT WHAT ISAIAH TELLS US IS THAT WHEN GOD ENTERS THE WORLD, IT'S FOR EVERYONE.**

**FOUR TIMES IN THIS PASSAGE, WE READ THE WORDS “WE ALL” AND EVERY ONE OF THEM IS SIGNIFICANT.**

**THE PROPHET SAYS, “*WE ALL HAVE BECOME AS ONE WHO IS UNCLEAN.*”**

**EVERY ONE OF US HAS SINNED.**

**EVERY PERSON OF EVERY NATION & EVERY GENERATION & EVERY AGE & EVERY RACE & EVERY RELIGION – NO EXCEPTIONS – WE HAVE ALL SINNED!**

**EVERY ONE OF US.**

**WE ALL NEED HELP.**

**THE PROPHET THEN SAYS, “*WE ALL FADE LIKE A LEAF.*”**

**WHAT AN APPROPRIATE TIME OF YEAR TO HEAR A WORD SUCH AS THIS AS WE WATCH LEAF AFTER LEAF FLOAT TO THE GROUND.**

**WITH ALL OF OUR DIFFERENCES, WE SHARE A COMMON DESTINY – WE WILL ALL, ONE DAY, DIE.**

**THEN, TWO VERSES LATER, ISAIAH SAYS, “*WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HAND.*”**

**GOD MADE EVERY ONE OF US.**

**AND FINALLY, AT THE EVERY END OF THE PASSAGE, THE PROPHET SAYS, “*NOW CONSIDER, WE ARE ALL YOUR PEOPLE.*”**

**HOW MUCH MORE CLEAR CAN THE POINT BE MADE THAT WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN?!**

**THIS ANCIENT PROPHET TELLS US THAT ADVENT IS A TIME WHEN WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT WE ARE ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.**

**IN JUST A FEW WEEKS, WE'LL HEAR THE SAME MESSAGE WHEN LUKE HAS THE ANGEL PROCLAIM TO THE SHEPHERDS, “*BEHOLD, I***

***BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF A GREAT JOY WHICH WILL COME TO ALL THE PEOPLE.***

**WE WILL SING OUT IN OUR CELEBRATION, “JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME!”**

**NOT “JOY TO THE *CHRISTIANS*” OR “JOY TO THE *AMERICANS*” OR “JOY TO THE *CHURCH PEOPLE*” BUT “JOY TO *THE WORLD!*”**

**ONE OF THE PAINTINGS THAT HANGS IN NATIVITY HALL, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHANCEL WALL, IS SALVADOR DALI’S PAINTING OF THE CRUCIFIXION.**

**IT’S AN APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR IT TO HANG BECAUSE IT OFFERS A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE FROM THE ONE WE HAVE FROM *THIS* SIDE OF THE WALL.**

**DALI INVITES YOU – JUST FOR A MOMENT – TO SEE THE CRUCIFIXION THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD.**

**OUR HEAVENLY FATHER LOOKS DOWN UPON THE FALLEN WORLD & SEES IT THROUGH THE EYES OF HIS SON, JESUS, DYING ON THE CROSS FOR ALL PEOPLE.**

**SEEING THE CRUCIFIXION THAT WAY REMINDS YOU OF THE LARGER MISSION OF JESUS.**

**HIS MISSION CERTAINLY INCLUDES YOU – SOMETHING YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE CROSS ON *THIS* SIDE OF THE WALL.**

**YOU LOOK INTO IT AND YOU KNOW THAT CHRIST DIED FOR *YOU*. BUT HIS MISSION DOESN’T END WITH YOU – OR WITH THOSE WHO ARE JUST *LIKE* YOU.**

**GOD’S LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST REACHES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.**

**THESE POWERFUL WORDS OF THE PROPHET WE’VE READ THIS MORNING – WORDS OF PROFOUND HOPE – ASSURE US THAT GOD IS**

**PRESENT IN EVERY MOMENT OF LIFE & THEY ASSURE US THAT GOD'S LOVE EXTENDS TO ALL PEOPLE.**

**PERHAPS THAT'S WHY WE ARE INCLUDED AMONG THE VAST THROGS OF "THOSE WHO WAIT."**

**PERHAPS IT'S NOT WE WHO WAIT.**

**PERHAPS IT'S GOD WHO IS PATIENTLY WAITING FOR US.**

**GOD WAITS & LONGS FOR US TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD IS WITH US IN ALL MOMENTS OF LIFE & THAT HIS LOVE EXTENDS TO ALL PEOPLE.**

**"ALL" MOMENTS MEANS "ALL MOMENTS" & "ALL" PEOPLE MEANS "ALL PEOPLE."**

**GOD WAITS FOR US TO GET IT. AMEN.**

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