

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 11.30.14 Advent 1b

Day One: Isaiah 64:1-9

³ *When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.* ⁴ *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 come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.*

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,” Isaiah says at the beginning of this chapter. When we are the victims of injustice, when we see the innocent being harmed, we might well share his feelings. We want God to make it right! Fix what is wrong!

Talking about God’s judgment, Isaiah says that God could “rend the heavens.” He could make the earth quake. He could burn everything up with fire. But instead, he “did things that we did not look for.” God did things we didn’t expect. And what was that?

God came to meet us. He came to bless us. “You come to the help of those who

gladly do right.” Even though we deserved his judgment, he came with mercy to those who waited for him.

We “continued to sin against” God’s ways. “All of us have become unclean,” and “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” We didn’t deserve God’s mercy.

And yet, God comes to us in a way we did not expect. He comes with mercy, love, and forgiveness.

What do you expect from God? Don’t just ask for his justice and righteousness. He has more to offer. What would you ask from God? He has better gifts to give.

In our nation today some want to get revenge on those who have harmed them. And revenge might feel good for a moment. But God wants to enter our lives and our community and bring reconciliation and restoration by washing away our sin.

Prayer: *Father in heaven, we pray “thy kingdom come.” Knowing that we deserve your judgment, we trust that we will receive your mercy and tender love because of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Teach us to carry your greater gifts into our world. Amen.*

Day Two: Isaiah 64

(continued)...

⁸ *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.* ⁹ *Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people.*

Have you ever watched someone making pots? It's a process that is both violent and gentle.

They call it "throwing pots" because the potter throws a lump of clay forcefully onto the wheel in order to be sure it will stick. "Smack!" It makes a loud noise as it sticks to the wheel.

And then the potter pushes the clay and squeezes the clay into shape. Her hands have to be strong to force the clay into the desired shape. But his touch must also be delicate, gently easing the clay into the desired form and giving it beauty that it did not have on its own.

Has God seemed rough at times? Can you think of times when he seems to have been throwing you onto the wheel, or squeezing you into shape? Sometimes with sudden and traumatic events our lives are

changed, and it doesn't feel very good to us.

But then, day by day, with many small things he has also been gently, slowly changing you. In ways that you hardly notice because they are so gradual, you have grown up. You are more mature, more patient, more understanding, even wiser, because God has patiently born with you and taught you through many daily interactions with his word, or with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

God shapes you because he loves you. He changes you because he desires to use you for a wonderful and noble purpose.

The finished ceramic piece is more beautiful than the raw clay. But it is also more useful. And the really satisfying part of its life happens after it has been shaped. Now at last we can see what the potter planned.

Prayer: *Father, you are the potter. You have the right to shape my life, and I know this is all for my good and a result of your love. Make me soft and willing to be shaped. Make me fit to your hand. Amen.*

Day Three: 1 Cor. 1:3-9

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge...*

Are you thankful for the gifts that other people receive? I confess, when I see my neighbor pull into his driveway in a brand new vehicle, I might experience a twinge of envy. When I see a large delivery truck stop at a house down the street, and the side of the truck announces “We Build Man-Caves!” I might not be very thankful for the gift that someone else is getting.

But Paul says that he gives thanks for the grace (the gifts) that God has given to the believers in Corinth. Why would their gifts make him thankful?

My next door neighbor has a giant self-propelled snow-blower, and I’m glad! I don’t know who gave it to him, but whenever there’s a really heavy snowfall, Jakob doesn’t stop at his own sidewalk, but he keeps going

right on down the block. What a relief! The gift (the grace) that he received results in grace for me and others.

You have also received God’s grace. You have received forgiveness for all your sins. You have been given the assurance that Jesus has risen from the dead, and so you also have nothing to fear from death.

Does anyone else have reason to be thankful that you have been given these gifts? Because you have been set free from guilt, are others around you lifted up by your joy? Because you know the Savior’s love, do others around you experience the result of that love?

If God has given you grace, the gift of forgiveness and eternal life, who else has reason to thank God because of you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I thank you for the gifts you have given to others who have loved me. You poured out you’re your love on them, and I have been blessed. Now, Lord, bless me to be a blessing to others. Amen.*

Day Four: Mark 13:24-37

³²"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

You would never purposely become addicted to alcohol or drugs, would you? No one would deliberately set out to become dependant on something like this. And yet, you watch how you use these things just to be sure.

You would never purposely become fat or sick, and yet you watch what you eat and you keep an eye on your health just in case, because we know that even if we don't mean to harm our bodies, we often do so anyway just because we aren't paying attention.

We would never purposely drive our car into another car. But unless we very deliberately take the steps to remain safe, to check our mirrors, to use our signals, to drive at a safe speed, we might very well cause an accident and a tragedy.

We would never abandon our faith in Jesus. We want to be ready when he returns in glory. But Jesus warns us, there are enemies who would lure us, distract us, pull us away from faith before the end. "Stay awake," he says.

Jesus calls us to deliberately be in his word, to purposely spend time in prayer, to carefully keep away from false teachers, to intentionally guard and grow in faith, and to choose to be in worship with the Body of Christ.

What part of your life do you especially need to watch? Where have you been feeling sleepy and need to wake up?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, keep watch over me. The days grow long as we wait for your coming. Fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I may be ready. Amen.*