

Sermon Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9

“Coming Home, Come Down Here”

Have y'all ever seen the movie National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation? There's this great scene when the parent's arrive at the Griswold's home for Christmas. It starts out with Beverly D'Angelo in the kitchen reading the circular from the newspaper and the doorbell rings in a typical cheery way. Ding dong! Then the scene shifts to the daughter listening to music through headphones and the doorbell ring is modulated. Then the doorbell rings again, and the notes take on a sense of grim fear and dread. The last time the doorbell rings it sounds more like, “dum dum dum dumb. Dum dum dum DUMB!” The sound of approaching doom. Then the parents arrive with all of their ailments and grievances. It's as if chaos walks through the door. Do y'all ever feel that way about your relatives coming to visit for the holidays?

In this morning's passage the prophet Isaiah is eager for God the Father to come to Israel. However, God coming down to Israel is not always a warm and fuzzy home coming. Sometimes the Day of the Lord takes a frightful turn. In the Bible the Day of the Lord can have two meanings. On the one hand the Day of the Lord can mean the day when the Lord comes and destroys the enemies of Israel. On the other hand the Day of the Lord can mean a day when Israel is punished by God for their wrong doing. For Isaiah, as a prophet in the palace of Israel, God coming down the mountain probably meant God coming into the temple in Jerusalem. Can you imagine the sound of that doorbell in the hearts and minds of Israel? Would the sound of the Lord's coming be cheery or more like the sounds of Israel's doom as God returns to God's chosen people to set them back on the right path?

A good deal of the answer comes from where the people are in their walk with God? Isaiah says,

“You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;

in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?” (64:5)

In those situations, where we have been eager for the Lord why wouldn't we be eager for the Lord's return? If we have been back sliding and slack in our devotion to God and God's glory shouldn't we have good reason to be nervous, or even afraid?

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. The season of Advent is a time of waiting and preparation for the Day of the Lord. This time of year we are eager for the day of the Lord. Our church is beautifully decorated to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25th. However, the world is not nearly so beautiful as our sanctuary. We have made choices which have made the world a dark place. We have to own that basic point. We are messed up. The world is messed up. We messed it up. As we wait for the King to arrive on Christmas day will we be caught up in our iniquities or will we respond to the call of God's grace to put things right?

I remember this time when I was about eleven. My brother and I were latch door key kids. I would look after my little brother, Ryan, who must have about eight until my Mom came home from work about six. My Dad had a second shift job at the time. Ryan and I had pretty well trashed the house. We had played War. We had built a fort. We had made chocolate milk. We had spilled some chocolate milk in all of our wrestling, and now only a hand towel covered the wet spot in the carpet. Our homework was not done. When Mom came home we were going to be in trouble. I tell ya, it was like a scene out of “The Cat in the Hat” where the fish sees the mother coming home and they have to clean things up double quick.

The problem with this kind of thinking is our relationship with Christ is not a test for which we can cram, or a house we can throw together to clean it up at the last minute. There is no Cat in the Hat with an out of this world machine to clean up our spiritual lives. Isaiah laments:

“We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” (64:6)

Humanity was created to be like clay in God the Father’s hands. Instead of being malleable wet clay we have become sharp, bitter broken shards. Isaiah lays the ground work for an image God will use through Jeremiah later on, where Jeremiah is told to take a clay pot outside the city gates and smash it on the ground at the elders’ feet to say this is what Israel has become. Israel has become a broken clay vessel – no longer useful – no longer of any worth. If we think about it, with news like this who would be eager for the Day of the Lord?

Well. There is this hope. A clay pot once broken and ground back into dust can be lumped together. The pile of dust can have water added to it. The dust and water can become soft clay again. We can become moldable again. However, we have to allow our sinfulness, and our iniquities to be broken. We have to see the sharp growing edges God has laid before us. We have to want to change. We have to want something different. We have to want something better for our lives which comes from God.

Sisters and brothers the birth of Christ is the same as the Day of the Lord. Maybe Christmas should be scary instead of always joyful. Christmas is the day God is born to be with us. Immanuel means God with us. Jesus is coming. The doorbell will be rung. How will we answer? Will we spend this season of Advent too busy shopping and decorating and partying to prepare ourselves for the coming of the King? Or will we repent, examine our celebration of the season and put God first in all things? God does not remember our iniquity forever. The birth of Jesus Christ is the birth of hope that things will not be like this for long. Easter Sunday is coming. God’s wrath for all of our iniquities will be poured out on Jesus Christ. There is no better gift than the gift of salvation. There is no greater freedom and no greater privilege than salvation through Jesus Christ. The price was too high for salvation to be anything else.

How will we respond to Jesus Christ’s gift of salvation? The doorbell is going to be rung. Will we answer the door with fear and trembling? Will we answer the door with eager and loving arms? If Christmas truly is the day of the Lord will we be ready for the arrival of the King? When we have guests coming to our house we clean up? We put out the good towels and prepare to make their favorite food. How will we prepare for the King this Christmas? **(pause)** I am willing to bet God wants more than a pretty sanctuary. I am willing to bet God wants more than well sung hymns by a talented choir. What would it be like if this Christmas if we turned back to God, and gave God our whole heart?

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen