

Devotion for the Week of the First Sunday of Advent

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

64 *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
 ² as when fire kindles brushwood
 and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!*
³ *When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
 ⁴ From ages past no one has heard,
 no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
 ⁵ You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
 We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷ There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
 ⁸ Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.*

The year 2020 has been a year of waiting...

- Waiting for our new pastor to join us at RELC.
- Waiting in social isolation as the dangers of the COVID-19 global pandemic spread.
- Waiting for an “all clear” to resume our normal lives.
- Waiting for a vaccine to provide immunity against the virus.
- Waiting and praying that our loved ones stay safe and healthy.

Yes, this has been a long year of waiting.

As we move into the season of Advent, we begin a new period of waiting. However, this one is different. We are waiting, in anticipation and celebration, for the “good news”, the gospel, of Christ’s birth – God’s gift to all mankind to show his love, caring and devotion for us. A gift none of us deserve, but a gift that is freely given and which we so desperately need.

The Israelites in the scripture lesson had been waiting seventy years to return to Judah and Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. The prophet writer of this lamentation offers a prayer which asks God to reveal his presence in some mighty and spectacular ways, “tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake” or as a fire kindles brush. All this to make your name known. The prophet confesses that the Israelites have forgotten their God because they’ve seen no awesome displays of his power, like as the “pillar of cloud by day” and “pillar of fire by night” during the exodus from Egypt. Lightning, thunder, clouds, and earthquake are often the symbols of theophany, a visible manifestation to humankind of God. Because God has hid himself, the people have sinned and been delivered into iniquity...as if it is God’s fault that people require demonstrations of his power to remain faithful. In his final plea, the prophet affirms the people’s trust in God by acknowledging “we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand” and implores God, “do not remember iniquity forever.”

During this season of Advent, let us not forget that God’s presence is always with us. We do not require spectacular, cataclysmic events, nor have to wait on God’s actions to know that his love for mankind is all around us. We do not have to wait for the birth of Jesus, for that has already occurred. During this time of excited anticipation to recognize and celebrate the birth of Christ, let us remember to love one another, seek justice for all, and share the message of good tidings and great joy with everyone we meet.

Let us pray:

Lord, grant us patience during this time of waiting and help us discover and share how your presence is manifested in our lives each and every day. We thank you for the gift of your son and for your enduring love for us. In Christ’s name we pray. **Amen.**