

## Advent 1

December 3, 2023 (Year B)



### PROCLAMATION POINTS

*The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.*

*Not only have such great strides been made in the world of commerce, but also in the spiritual field have there been great changes. Error, sin, and falsehood have never held sway in the world as in these last centuries...*

*such sins cry to heaven, and so provoke  
and defy the last day that it must  
soon break in upon them.*

*– Martin Luther –*

*Sermon, Second Sunday in Advent*

### Isaiah 64:1–9

Israel had rebelled against the Lord God and things were getting ugly between Creator and creature. In the previous chapter of Isaiah, God had left Israel to the devices of their enemies because of their idolatry and distrust of him. His judgment against them was like grapes being trampled in the winepress (Isaiah 63:3). But then the Lord relented from his anger as his people cried out to him to remember them, even as they remembered all that God had done for them in the days of Abraham and Moses. They cried out to the Lord to come down from heaven and save them from their enemies. They acknowledged the wonders of the Lord Almighty who had done great things for them, things they never imagined or dreamed possible. The people affirmed God's patience and God's care for those who wait patiently for him to act.

- *Why are we humans so impatient for God to act even as we know that God will act in his own time?*

Isaiah 64:6–7 is a confession of sin, “in our sins we have been a long time... we have become like one who is unclean... there is no one who calls upon your name.” Their confession of sin was followed by an acknowledgement that God is the potter and Israel is the clay that is formed by his hand.

- *In what ways does God form us through forgiveness and mercy?*
- *How is our acknowledgement of our sin an invitation for the potter to shape us into who he wants us to be?*

### Psalms 80:1–7

The psalmist centered this hymn around Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob. Joseph had an important role in feeding the tribes of Jacob during the famine in Egypt. God led young Joseph through the bitterness of sibling rivalry, and his brothers' plot to do away with him for good. Out of this Joseph and his brothers, God created his vine that was led through the wilderness and replanted in the promised land.

- *How was Joseph's life important for the sustainability of Israel?*
- *Why is our family history important for our lives today?*

### 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Spiritual gifts have often been a source of strife within the church, debating over who has what and who doesn't. Assessing the giftedness of others or taking pride in our own gifts all too often creates a hierarchy among believers. This was certainly the case among the Christians in Corinth.

Their constant ranking and comparison led to endless conflict in their congregation. Addressing that conflict was a key purpose of Paul's letters to the Corinthian congregation. Right at the beginning he made a declaration about spiritual gifts, giving thanks that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift. He started right out by leveling the hierarchy the Corinthians had so carefully constructed.

- *What comes to mind when you hear a term like “spiritual gifts”?*
- *Do you think of some people as more spiritually gifted than others?*
- *How do you understand the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit?*
- *How do the gifts of the Spirit aid us during this time of waiting for the kingdom to come?*

### Mark 13:24–37

Speculation about the end times has been a preoccupation of Christians since the day of Christ's ascension. Wondering, watching, and waiting have been the lot of the people of God. In every generation there has been someone who couldn't resist the temptation to interpret signs and events and start the clock running on Christ's return. And every generation has passed on, still waiting for the day of the Lord.

- *In what sense can a preoccupation with time-lines and prediction of the end times stem from a lack of faith?*

As he was approaching his crucifixion, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the coming of a new age, but he did not give them many details. He warned them of signs and spoke of budding trees heralding spring, but he gave them no timeline. He simply told them to stay awake, keep their eyes open, and to be ready. There are no days off for God's chosen ones. We are called to be in a perpetual state of readiness.

- *What does it look like to be ready for the return of Christ? Is the coming of Christ something for us to fear?*
- *What kinds of signs do you expect to signify Christ's return?*

Jesus spoke of the angels coming to gather in his elect. The image of election can be disconcerting at times. It carries with it the fear of being absolutely without control of our situation. It certainly sounds as if everything, the timing of the new kingdom, the signs that will precede it, and who will be received into it, is in God's hands.

- *Why does the notion that the future is in God's hands and not ours cause us to worry?*
- *In what sense is God's election and control the only thing that can provide any real hope in the face of the future?*