

Come on Down! #172 MWB
Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37; I Cor. 1:3-9

The popular TV show, *The Price Is Right* was hosted by Bob Barker. Today's host is Drew Carey. When you receive tickets to this highly-watched, fast-moving game show, you become automatically eligible to become a participant. During the show, names are drawn, and an announcer exclaims: "Betty Friesen, come on down!"

Betty excitedly jumps from her seat and runs down to the front of the game show set to compete with other contestants for an opportunity to go on the platform to guess the price of various show cases. If Betty guesses right, she will beat out the other competitors by coming the closest to the price of a certain item or items. When this happens, she runs onto the platform to compete for various prizes and show cases. Competing on *The Price Is Right* all begins when the announcer calls a contestant's name and asks them to "Come on down!"

On this first Sunday of Advent, we have a picture of Isaiah's desire for God to reveal Himself once again to His people. The great hymn we just sang, reveals this desire of Isaiah and all followers of Jesus, for God to come down, to show up, to make his presence known and felt.

Read Isaiah 64:1-9

This is Isaiah's desire & it's also our desire. How are we getting ready for Christmas? Have we gotten out our Christmas CD's yet? Have we started our gift shopping? Have we decided what Christmas cookies we are going to bake? Have we written our Christmas cards yet? Have we put up our Christmas trees? Have we set the dates for our family gatherings? Stores put up Christmas displays earlier and earlier. I've learned to support my wife's

desire to be on the look out all year, for unique presents that connect with people in the family. While this may seem out of place, aren't we merely following the traditional advice: "One can never start too early to get ready for something big?"

Advent is a time of expectation, anticipation, and preparation for celebrating the fact that Jesus came into this world 2,000 years ago. We worship Jesus who has come into the hearts of those who believe and has caused us to become born again...to become new creations...to mature as children of God. And we also recognize that Jesus will come back again and usher in God's kingdom in all its fullness!

"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!" The prophet Isaiah is speaking on behalf of a people who are powerless and oppressed. His address is in the form of a prayer which contains the hope of Advent.

Isaiah reminds God about how God came and helped in the past. So he is waiting for God to come again, "to make your name known to your adversaries." He reminds us, "you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down. 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."

Isaiah is counting on the fact that God has done it before – lived with his people when he guided them into the Promised Land. So He's waiting for Christ, the Messiah. He petitions Christ to "come down." But to attract God's attention, something must be done besides shouting. As the prophet surveyed the situation, he lowered his voice and confessed the guilt of the nation, God's anger, and his awesomeness. Sin and guilt is so bad that, "We have all become like one

who is unclean,” so, “God has hidden his face from us, and has delivered us into the hands of our own immorality” – into the natural and evil consequences of our sins. The nation was finished and people in exile.

Isaiah was praying to God the Father, to not be exceedingly angry. “Don’t remember our sin forever. Please, consider your people. Come down. Be present with us.”

Our focus statement for today, the first day of advent is: We awaken to God’s purpose, which begins in darkness – whether seed on the ground, child in the womb, or new self in the soul. We are shaking, fearful, and resistant, yet we call upon God to tear open the heavens and be present with us in our uncertainty, anxiety and feebleness.

We are invited to join with God to bring about change. We realize that the world is not in harmony with God’s initial design or will. Individuals, businesses, people groups, and countries are all majoring in sin. The result is selfishness, greed, mass killings, fear, genocide, wars, climate change, lust for power and in some places economic chaos.

When we had the recent solar eclipse, some evangelicals wondered – was this a sign from God? Could be. We are supposed to be watching for signs. But I’ve heard no one say, “Should we consider three big big hurricanes, floods fires, droughts, & several major earthquakes, in a short time, as signs from God?” Instead, we call them natural disasters, when maybe they are warnings from our Creator, calling for our attention.

And what about the religious and ethnic violence, mass shootings, political unrest, and wars, all around the world?

But in the darkness of these multiple signs, there is hope for improvement; there is anticipation for restoration. There is hope for

peace and salvation. That’s what Isaiah’s was praying. It’s what we pray today in our confusion, the world changing, the evil we see and hear about daily. Just as Isaiah was asking God to come down, for Israel in exile, we also, are invited, again, this advent, to ask for God to show up for us and this world today.

And God did show up for Israel. He did come down for us. He sent the Christ, the Good News, Messiah. And the church was birthed. God had come down before and he’s come down again. And he will again.

Read Mark 13:24-37

Each of us probably remember when the school teacher stepped out of the classroom for a few minutes. They probably gave us an assignment to carry out while they were gone. And they probably offered a warning.

We all know what happened as soon as the teacher was out the door and down the hall. When the teacher is away, there is a test, a test that many people flunk.

Some of you may recall that all heck broke loose. Some kids worked, or tried to, while other kids made spitballs & paper airplanes. Others wandered around between the desks, talking, poking, copying homework, etc.

Sometimes the whole affair got organized - one or two kids would stand near the door, listening and watching for the teacher’s return, while their buddies ransacked the room, wrote notes on the board, or did something to one of the teachers books.

Right now the teacher is away and we are living between Christ’s first coming as a babe in the manger, to teach us, and his second coming as Lord and Judge. We live between beginnings. And the question for us today, while we are in this state is quite simply:

Are we going to pass the test set for us by our teacher's physical absence? Or are we going to flunk that test - just as so many did back when we were in school?

Most of the New Testament is concerned with the problem of God's absence. When Jesus was here with us in the flesh - that was one thing. But in his absence, in the time between his first Advent and the next - what of our discipleship, followership?

Things between us and God tend to be fine, when we are in here, at worship, in the saintly fellowship, experiencing the Holy Spirit's presence. But what about later, when we walk out the church door and we are back in the world? What then?

Isn't life and this world a little bit like it was back in our school days? Some do their work - some can be trusted, and some can not. But Jesus still put us in charge of the classroom. We each have our own living to do. He gives us in our Mark text, examples of - "watch, keep awake, be ready," as we wait for Jesus to come down again.

Christ is coming again, and we need him to come again, because too many of his class have become unruly. While we long for Jesus' return, as Isaiah and Israel longed for his coming, we long for the classroom to be a place of harmony and peace, where the wicked will perish and the faithful will receive their reward.

The Bible frequently reminds us we do not need to be overly concerned about just when the teacher will return. We should not worry because we have our living and witness to do in the meantime. While we wait and watch, we can trust God to honour our work and faithfulness. We can count on him to keep his promise to be merciful and kind to those who have lived by faith in him

The teacher will come down. He's come before. The faithful and the unfaithful alike will see him coming. He will come with his angels in the clouds with great power and glory. There will be peace and justice, greater than which came when our earthly school teachers returned to their classes. In the mean time, our Corinthians text tells us how to live.

Read I Corinthians 1:3-9

A summary of the Corinthians text is God has come down on us, already, today. We know this because He gives us His grace. He enriches us in speech and knowledge. The Holy Spirit provides us with all the spiritual gifts. It's mentioned twice that we will be kept strong. We are assured that God is faithful. And we are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ, God's Son, sent to be with us, today and always. Plus we are promised, we will be blameless on that day when Jesus Christ returns.

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to spend the rest of his life as a contemplative monk. "Your Majesty," said Prior Richard, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

"I understand," responded Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Prior Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you." The king did. When King Henry died, this following statement summarized his response to his high calling: "The King learned to rule by being obedient."

When we tire of our responsibilities and roles, it helps to remember God planted us where we are and expects us to grow in holiness and obedience. When our health discourages us and the deaths of friends and family depress, our Corinthians text reminds us to be thankful for God's grace.

We are to appreciate how Jesus' teachings have enriched our lives. We are invited to keep using our spiritual gifts as we wait for Jesus to come down again. And we know that when we in Christ's fellowship that is faithful & obedient, God further strengthens sanctifies us, forming us increasingly in the image of his Son.

Isaiah tells us God came down when he called his people Israel to be a witness, a light for the whole world. The Messiah they expected came down to not just restore Israel, but the whole world. Mark tells us God as Jesus will come down again. And in Corinthians we are told how God has already begun the process of coming down.

So Advent and Christmas is a reminder to look forward to and be ready for God coming down again. Such a vision will definitely change the way we live from day to day...every day! Let's celebrate what God has done, what God is doing among us and in the world, and what God will do in the future!

And because He is down here with us, we are also preparing for that grand and wonderful day when there will be no more pain or sorrow or death. We are getting ready for an event that has no equal in human experience and for which we wait with eager anticipation! Remember: "One can never start too early to get ready for something big!" Come on down Lord Jesus.