**Isaiah 64:1-9**

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might 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, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! **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. **5** 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? **6**  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. **7**  There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. **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.

**“Rend The Heavens And Come Down!”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. With the official start of the holiday season now upon us, there are plenty of lists to consider. You have your list of presents to buy. You have your list of cards to send. You have your list of groceries to get. You have your list of places to travel. You have your list of what it is all going to cost. One list after another, but they all anticipate a goal. It is to see you through the hustle and bustle of the holidays. What would happen if there were no lists? Anticipation during the season would turn out to be more a shocking surprise than eager waiting.

The blue paraments today tell us it is the first Sunday of Advent. This means the start of a new church year, so happy New Year! As with a new year, there is anticipation. Christians direct all of this to Christ. Yes, celebrating Christmas is part of that in a few weeks, but it also is to that Final Day when God’s Son reveals Himself in all glory. Meanwhile as we wait, the saints have a list, but not like those for the holidays. Since Advent is a season of penitence or lament, the church’s list is a Litany or prayerful supplications to God. The Litany we pray from the hymnal goes back to the 4th century, but a list of prayer for God to remember His promises goes back much farther. Your invitation in Advent is to anticipate that God answers His people with salvation.

Anticipate the only answer is to have God intervene. Isaiah the prophet knew this was going to be the only hope for Israel in the end. Two hundred years prior, he foresaw Jerusalem destroyed and Israel taken into captivity by Babylon that would happen in the 6th century. A broken and battered people were to find value in the prayerful words Isaiah offered saying, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down…” It was once again for God to make His presence known. The enemy had the upper hand in everything. Would the false gods of Babylon prevail? Would there be anything left of the people God called to be His possession? There were only questions and no answers. For God to “rend” the heavens was to change the sorry state of affairs by His hand. It was for Him to tear into unchanging times to change them.

The intervention of God is what we need. The tone of Advent has been set this year. We lament over decorations hung with words saying, “Season’s greetings” for what do we see? In Ferguson Missouri, there has been rioting and not peaceful protest. Such darkness even has spread to other major cities. Besides the collapsing of our culture, we continue to play the blame game in the church as if that will solve the problem. Have we not learned WHO is to intervene in this mess caused by sin, death, and the Devil? The closed system of what we see must be open to anticipate by faith what we do not see possible. Martin Luther states, “The meaning then, is this: ‘Rend the heavens and according to Your custom do such things as no one has seen or heard and no one expects’” (LW). More than God in control is to know God cares to intervene. This is the successful promise we have from Christ, so the distressed can hope in Him.

Anticipate admitting no answer rests in us. Israel faced that distressing reality repeatedly as a people. All roads led back to the same dismal fate for those worshiping the works of their hands. Isaiah summarized it well in his prayer, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” It is not as if Israel was ever any different. God’s grace only covered them to be a unique kind of people. When He removed His loving presence, darkness was all they had left. What they later confessed is what the prophet Isaiah long ago taught. It was to acknowledge, “You have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.” This is no less than what Jesus revealed in Lord’s Prayer to say to our Father, “Forgive us our trespasses…” Without forgiveness from God surely all efforts end in dismal end.

The repentant now look for the face of God to shine His grace upon sinners. This is why Jesus greets those baptized into His Name at the start of a new church year. He invites us to confess our need of Him anticipating His saving presence in Word and Sacrament. It is throw our sin, grief and shame down before God’s Son saying, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” The suffering and death of Christ proves God has rendered judgment once for all. Israel felt what this sting meant in their lives asking from captivity, “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?” We feel the same biting question bombard us in this age. Grief from various circumstances caused by sin and death weigh down on us. Rather than look for blame or find an answer in our righteousness that are filthy rags. Let us say, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.”

Anticipate there is a faithful answer. Isaiah foresaw this to be present for Israel after facing disaster. It was to be the God of promise, “who acts for those who wait for him.” Israel would return to the Promised Land at the right time. Likewise, at the right time Christ came as the answer of waiting for all people. He is the mediator between God and humanity born of the Virgin Mary. He convicts all by His sacrifice and stands in our place before God to consume the anger held against us. In searching for an answer to Ferguson president Harrison of the LCMS comments, “This nation is sick unto death. The church has the answer: Jesus Christ. Jesus is neither white, or black. Jesus is the eternal answer for Officer Wilson and Michael Brown, and for all of us.” Waiting upon the Savior of sinners never puts any to shame. The promise from Jesus is to receive WHAT keeps us safe, to see WHO delivers this hope of forgiveness, and to know WHY prayer continues in His Name until Christ comes in all glory.

This kind of salvation gives the answer that God is the potter while we are the clay. It happens as He shapes each of us by the Word and Sacraments. Here the work of the Holy Spirit creates, sustains, and instructs us in the one true faith. As St. Paul declares, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” This fellowship goes the way of the cross because God promises to care for His people. Let us look beyond the desolation suffered so much today in the state, church, and even our very lives. To know the Law is good and must be upheld, but only the Gospel is the eternal treasure of life for sinners. Your invitation in Advent is to anticipate that God answers His people with salvation. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.