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Isaiah 64:1-9 – *Crying Out: Come Down!*

Preached at Trinity CRC

First Sunday in Advent - November 29, 2020

Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
that the mountains would tremble before you!

<sup>2</sup> As when fire sets twigs ablaze  
and causes water to boil,  
come down to make your name known to your enemies  
and cause the nations to quake before you!

<sup>3</sup> For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,  
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

<sup>4</sup> Since ancient times no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

<sup>5</sup> You come to the help of those who gladly do right,  
who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them,  
you were angry.

How then can we be saved?

<sup>6</sup> All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

<sup>7</sup> No one calls on your name  
or strives to lay hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us  
and have given us over to our sins.

<sup>8</sup> Yet you, LORD, are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

<sup>9</sup>Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;  
do not remember our sins forever.

Oh, look on us, we pray,  
for we are all your people.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

On Monday, Kristi got a call at 7am...

It was her dad letting us know that Kristi's grandma passed away.

Grandma Kratzer, at 91, was diagnosed with COVID a few week earlier...

She had been in and out of the hospital with a fever...

But she died in her room—

No family around, maybe a nurse—

Just pictures of her family around her.

She died alone.

She's not the only one...

Hundreds (maybe thousands) of people have died alone.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, Lord!”

This past week we heard that students are back to online learning (grades 7-12).

We heard that social gatherings are limited to people in your own household.

Parents are tired...

They don't want to have to teach their kids at home...

Or make sure they're doing their work;

Students want to be with their friends;

None of us want to have our interactions limited...

Especially around the holidays...

We need other people.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, Lord!”

In late October there was news that came out of the States:

545 migrant children are still separated from their parents.

They were separated 2-3 years ago when their families tried crossing the US-Mexico border...

And 545 children still are not with their parents.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, Lord!”

The September Opioid Surveillance Report was put out by the Alberta government.

Deaths due to fentanyl overdose more than doubled from Q1 to Q2.

That means there are over 2 times the amount of people dying from fentanyl overdose since COVID started in March.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, Lord!”

We are living in a broken world.

We are living in a very difficult time.

We are lamenting God’s distance...

Asking him to draw near to us once again...

We know that *he* can change things.

This is Isaiah’s plea in our passage...

That the Lord would come down...

That the Lord would make his presence known again.

Isaiah lived during hard times:

He lived during war...

When the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria.

He lived in Judah under the threat of that same Assyrian army...

And then the Babylonians.

Isaiah possibly experienced the exile...

And when Israel went back home after 70 years away in Babylonian captivity.

Excitement to return home was high...

But what they came back to was a destroyed temple...

They came back to hard economic times...

Still surrounded by their enemies.

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, Lord.”

Isaiah is lamenting God’s distance:

“God, what is separating us?”

“God, whatever it is, do away with it!”

“Tear down the divider and come to us!”

Where does Isaiah land the problem?

What is the barrier that’s separating God and his people?

Is it literally the sky or the heavens?

Is it the external circumstances facing God’s people:

Is it the enemies that live in the land?

Coming back to a destroyed temple;

Poverty, or a lack of resources?

Isaiah holds up a spiritual mirror to the people:

“Look in the mirror,” he says.

“The problem is us...”

“It’s our sin that is causing the distance.”

Isaiah’s lament turns into an explicit statement on sin...

His cry of lament turns to a cry of confession.

What does Isaiah’s confession tell us about sin?

First, sin separates.

“You have hidden your face from us,” Isaiah says. (64:7)

The Lord withdraws himself from Israel...

Allowing them to be overtaken by their enemies.

The Lord removes the people from his presence...

Sending them into captivity in Babylon...

All because of their sin.

They didn't listen to him.

They didn't follow him.

“We've all become like one who is unclean...”

If you're unclean, you cannot be in the presence of a holy and pure God.

Sin separates us from God.

And if you're wondering how/why God do this—

How the Creator can separate himself from his creation—

Remember that it starts with us...

Humans started the hiding game.

In Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve first sin against God...

What do they do when they hear God coming?

They hide. (Gen 3:8)

They hide themselves from the Lord's presence.

In our sin we separate ourselves from God...

We did it back then, and we continue to do it today...

Preferring the quick pleasures and comforts of sin...

Over following the Lord's will.

And that sin separates us.

Not only does sin separate, it is never satisfied.

Sin is not something that we do once and get it out of our system.

It is like a hungry monster that just keeps needing more and more.

It starts in one area of our life and then slowly bleeds over into other areas.

What we think is just a personal sin—

Not hurting anyone—

We realize that it invades our relationships at home, school, and work...

It impacts everything we think, say, and do.

We are helpless over it...

And so we keep giving ourselves to it.

It *demand*s more, so we *give* more.

“We shrivel up like a leaf...”

“And like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

Like a dead leaf that gets blown around by the wind—

Unable to control where it floats—

So too does sin take us to places we don’t want to go...

Places we cannot help *but* to go.

Sin is never satisfied...

And takes us along for the ride...

Dragging us further and further away from the Lord.

Finally, what we can say is that sin kills...

It’s the reason we die.

We were meant for life—

Never created for death—

But with our sin we bring death into the world.

Again, it’s captured in this image of a shriveled leaf.

We’ve disconnected ourselves from the source of life...

And so, we begin to fade.

We go from a vibrant green leaf—

In the excitement of sin, we may even experience a pretty red or yellow—

But finally to a dull-brown where all life has been removed from us.

When we disconnect from life...

We experience death.

Physical death for sure eventually comes to us all...

But sin slowly chokes the life out of us spiritually...even now.

Sin separates us from God;

Sin is never satisfied;

And sin kills us.

Isaiah says that *this* is the problem.

*This* is the barrier between the people and God.

*This* is what needs to be conquered...

Not Israel's physical enemies!

Their turning from God is what needs to be corrected.

But the people are powerless to do it themselves.

Isaiah said it himself:

"We're stuck."

"We continue to sin against your ways."

"Still no one is reaching out for you!"

"Can we be saved?" he asks...

What a sad question.

A question full of despair...

"Can I be saved?"

"Is there hope?"

They are stuck in this terrible cycle:

They sin and God turns his face.

Because God turns his face...

They continue in their sin.

They need to break the cycle...

But they can't.

Sin has its claws deep in the people.

Sin has its claws deep in us.

We need a help that is divine.

And this is where Isaiah turns:

“Lord, you are our Father.”

“We are your people.”

“You formed us.”

“We need you.”

“Come down to us, not in anger”—

“Don’t give us what we deserve for our sins against you”—

“Come down to us in mercy.”

“Break this cycle that we can’t break ourselves.”

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and *come down!*”

We are in the season of Advent...

A word that means “coming.”

Every year in Advent, we remember Christ’s first coming...

Where the cry of Isaiah is answered by God.

God himself tears open the heavens and comes down...

He comes down in flesh and blood as one of us.

[When Jesus Christ was baptized...

It says that heaven was torn open...

And the Spirit descended upon him. (Mark 1:10)]

Jesus—

Immanuel, God with us—

Comes down for this problem that is agonized over in Isaiah...

He comes down to save the people from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

What the people were powerless to do in their own strength—

Powerless over sin that:

Separates;  
Is never satisfied;  
Brings death to all—

What we were powerless over...

Jesus comes to conquer.

Jesus destroyed the barrier that was between us and God.

Destroyed it completely and destroyed it forever.

The first piece of Advent is remembering God's grace to us in Christ:

How he *did* come down to us in mercy;  
God *did* remember that we are his people;  
God *did* direct his anger elsewhere.

He took care of our biggest problem:

The sin that separates us from God.

We remember and we celebrate...

That God did once tear open the heavens and come down.

The second piece of Advent is that we anticipate his coming again.

We look around and we see all that is broken...

In our lives, in our city, and around the world.

We can blame it on governments, unfair distribution of wealth...

Blame it on the way we were raised...

On an uncontrollable virus...

Or any number of things.

But we know that the root of our problem is sin.

Insatiable sin that separates us from God and brings death...

Sin that we cannot get rid of.

So, our cry is "come down!"

"Tear open the heavens again and come down."

God has already come down to us in Jesus Christ—

Defeating sin's power over us—

Now we ask him to come down and get rid of these things forever:

“Come down and bring an end to this virus.”

“Come down so no one else has to die alone.”

“Come down and relieve us of the loneliness, stress, and exhaustion.”

“Come down and bring justice to children who have been separated from parents.”

“Come down and make things right!”

We cry out to God and we wait.

Because God came down to us once...

We know that he will come down to us again.

He promises to come back and set things right...

And we know that his promises are solid.

And, as we wait, we prepare:

We repent of the sin that still hangs on in our lives...

Bringing our honest selves to God and others for healing;

We remember and recall God's previous work in our lives and in the world...

Giving him our praises for his faithfulness;

And we pray without ceasing for him to come. (Stan Mast)

O Come O Come Immanuel...

Come down to us again.

Amen.

