

November 30, 2014
Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Isaiah 64:1–9 (ESV)

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

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.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

This morning, in our Old Testament Reading, Isaiah offers us the prayer of a watchman.

I wish we could see him . . . this watchman . . . standing on his tower. Normally, watchmen are stationed on the towers of cities worth saving. For example, we could imagine a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem, warning the people of any danger on the horizon. The city is beautiful. It has an imposing palace, an expansive temple, and all of the splendor, wisdom, and power that the queen of Sheba herself came to see. *That* Jerusalem would be a city worth saving.

This Jerusalem, however, is different. “Desolate.”

That’s what Isaiah calls her. Isaiah foresees Jerusalem after the fall of the Southern Kingdom. She has been gutted of her inhabitants by war.

Some have fled to Egypt.

Others have been taken as exiles to Babylon.

Those who remain are few and poor.

“Desolate,” “No Longer Sought After,” that’s what Isaiah calls her.

So why would a watchman stand on the walls of that city? What is there to protect? Who even cares?

If you listen closely to Isaiah’s prayer, you will understand. The watchman isn’t talking to the people; he’s talking to God. The watchman isn’t waiting for enemies; he’s waiting for God.

Isaiah has stationed watchmen to stand there, in the midst of destruction, and remember God's promises. Because those promises change lives.

This morning, listen to this watchman's prayer.

Hear how God invites us to be His people who acknowledge our sin and hope for salvation from Him.

Through this ancient prayer, God forms us to be people who pray. We pray faithfully, and we pray fervently.

God's people pray faithfully in times of trouble

It is easy to fall into the language of blame.

Who caused all of the trouble we are experiencing?

You see it in politics, as every crisis feeds into talk shows, with hosts throwing around blame.

You can even see it in the church. When trouble arises, people look for someone to blame.

Isaiah knows that after Jerusalem has been destroyed and Israel taken into exile, God's people will be tempted by the language of blame.

He lets us overhear the prayer of those who would blame their enemies for this destruction. The watchman cries out for God to come, to cause the nations to tremble at His presence (v 2).

After all, these are the ones who have destroyed the Lord's own sanctuary and afflicted His people (63:18; 64:11). How can God remain silent (64:12)?

Isaiah also lets us overhear those who would blame God for the problem. God has hidden His face from them (v 7).

He has made them to wander from His ways and hardened their hearts so that they don't fear Him (63:17).

In the end, however, the watchman utters a prayer of faith. It is not the enemies' fault. It is not God's fault. It is our fault.

For we have sinned, and the watchman cries out, "How shall we be saved?"

In the context of that heartfelt repentance, the watchman remembers the promises of God. *"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"* (v 8).

In a world where Christianity is under attack, discipleship is difficult. Those who confirmed their faith as youth walk away from the church as adults.

Those who do stay wonder why it can't be easier. And our struggles can lead into blame: blaming the culture for falling away from God. The church becomes a refuge for people sick with the culture and angry at the world.

As the world looks in, they overhear our conversations, and we don't sound like a people confessing our sin. We sound like a people condemning the sins of others...a people quick to blame others and slow to confess our own sins.

Suddenly, to the world, the church looks like a place of hypocrites: people who think they are better than others, fueling hatred toward the world.

How good it is that Isaiah has stationed a watchman on the walls of fallen Jerusalem to teach God's people to pray!

His words call us to repent of our sins and to come before God as a people filled not with hatred but humility.

“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (v 6).

How good it is that Isaiah has stationed a watchman to cry out to God, because even today, His words remind us of our hope.

God is our Father. He created us, and when we fell into sin, He promised not to abandon His children. In sending His only Son to die for our sin and to claim us as His own, God became our Father.

We are the clay, and He is the potter, and even now he sends his Spirit to bring us forgiveness and to fashion us as a new people in him—a people who pray, faithfully and fervently.

God’s people pray fervently.

This Sunday, Advent begins . . . *again*.

The fact that Advent begins *again* is troubling. Christ has not yet come. The lack of Christ’s return causes some to scoff about the validity of Christianity (2 Pet 3:3–4).

Are we a people who cling to superstitions and old gods? Perhaps we should just give up on a religion that the world thinks has caused so much war and bloodshed.

It is hard for God’s people to remain fervent in prayer.

It is hard now, and it was hard then.

Yet Isaiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foresees a coming time when some in Israel will have stopped calling on God. The war and desolation have taken their toll, leading some to believe that God is not the answer.

As Isaiah says, people no longer rouse themselves up to take hold of God (v 7). What is a watchman to do?

Some would say the watchman should start issuing commands to the people. Start telling the people to pray more fervently. But Isaiah knows better.

Faith is not a matter of our own working, rousing ourselves up to believe in God. Faith is the work of God. It comes by the power of the Spirit as God makes promises to His people.

So, the watchman that Isaiah stations on the wall does something simple and yet profound.

In the midst of the desolate landscape and the fallen city, he remembers the promises of God.

He recalls the deliverance from Egypt, the awesome things that God did. No ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like this. He is the one who acts for those who wait for him (v 4).

Is your prayer life impoverished? Don't go out and buy another book on prayer. Listen to the promises of God.

God's Word inspires prayer by bringing you His promises. When you hear what God has done, you begin to long for what God will do.

When you look around at a world in need, you look beyond that world to God, who *"acts for those who wait for Him,"* and you pray that He would *"stir up His power and come."*

You turn to God in prayer. Prayer that is faithful, confessing your sin, and prayer that is fervent, looking forward to the fullness of His salvation in Christ.

Isaiah's watchman stood on a desolate city and prayed, and His prayer continues to speak today. People today are tempted to call the church "*desolate*" and "*no longer sought after.*"

Can you overhear the conversation? I've heard people say things like: "I was raised in the church, but as I grew older, I just stopped going. It's funny, but I don't really miss it." numerous times.

It's not hard to find those who have left the church. They could be in your family, among your friends. They are definitely there outside these doors. But today, God calls His people to be watchmen.

Those who continue to pray for His presence in this world. They pray faithfully, confessing their sins before God and trusting in Christ for their forgiveness. And they pray fervently, longing for the return of Christ and the dawn of a new creation. As you call on the name of Christ, be a watchman. Share the Gospel.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria
To God alone be glory

“The Watchman’s Prayers”
Isaiah 64:1–9

1. God’s people pray faithfully.
2. God’s people pray fervently.
3. God answers those prayers with Christ.