

**November 27, 2020 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent**  
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**Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19**  
**1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37**

**Beloved of Christ Jesus, blessings in the name of the One who was,** and the One who is, and the One who is to come. Amen.

**These readings always surprise me.**

It's the start of the new church year,  
the start of Advent,  
the start of this season of preparation, preparing for the coming of Jesus...  
...And the readings always surprise me.

Maybe you were surprised too.

**I'm not new to Advent, many of you aren't either.**

It's part of our tradition, and, indeed, part of this congregation's practice,  
While the world, *even in the midst of a pandemic*, steps smoothly, it seems, directly, from Thanksgiving to  
Christmas, I love the small steps through this blue season.

**Even with these small steps, the way Advent starts, throws me.**

I expect we'd read from the beginning of a gospel, maybe hear of Mary's strength, her honesty, her trust.  
I expect words from the prophets like Comfort, comfort, oh my people...prepare the way of the Lord.  
I expect John the Baptist's call.  
We'll hear all of that and more in the coming weeks, but today on this first Sunday of Advent, it's lament and  
warning we hear, and, oh, is it honest.

**Maybe that's also what throws us, at least in part: the honesty!**

I've heard Mark Hanson talk about lament, about the practice of keening.  
Do you know that word?  
Keening is wailing in bodily grief, in lament.  
Mark describes almost beating your chest as you cry out.  
While it's more familiar in some cultures than others, I suspect that many of us know something of keening,  
whether or not we'd use that word.  
It's the sound, the cry, that expresses deepest despair and pain, it's haunting, and it's honest.  
There is much to lament these days.

**Each of today's passages is rich with honesty, and each knows something of lament, despair.**

Let's walk through them briefly, a mini bible study, and then I've got an invitation for you.

You may find the bulletin helpful as we look at the scripture.

**"O, God, that you would tear open the heaven and come down."**

That's what we hear from the prophet Isaiah this morning: that's the lament, the keening.

"Do something, God. You've done it before, do something now, and something big, we need you."

Twenty some chapters earlier, in some of the most beloved passages of the Bible,

Isaiah cast a vision for a rebuilt Jerusalem, a vibrant, renewed people.

But now, here, when the people have finally returned from exile, the experience is far from that vision:

They are back...and it is a mess: ruin and conflict, famine.

This passage is written with collective sin as the frame work:

We all sin. We all are unclean. We all are shaped by the potter, all made new.

Even, or maybe especially, in our quarantine and distanced isolation, in this polarized time,

this collective spirit needs to be heard. Together we sin, together we cry, together we are being shaped.

The cry this morning is bitterly honest: tear open the heaven, God, come down.

**The psalm today, Psalm 80, has a similar powerful thru-line.**

Restore us, o God,

let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

There is also a plea in this psalm:

Stir up your strength, and come to help us.

It's this line and those similar to which we return each week of Advent in our prayer of the day-listen for it!

Stir up your power, O Christ, and come.

Friends, in the best of times, we might *think about* prayers like this, but we don't quickly utter them.

When life is easy, we don't often cry out to God to stir things up.

Advent, then, is a time for truth telling, for honestly naming our need and asking God to stir us up.

**There's honesty in today's Gospel, as well, the reading from Mark.**

By next week we'll hear the beginning of the Gospel, but today *we start at the end*, right before Jesus' crucifixion.

Mark has been telling the story, step by step: and then Jesus did this, and then he did that.

But for a short spread of verses, Mark changes his pace, like the narrator looking up and realizing that there are things the audience simply must hear.

Keep awake, Mark has Jesus say, seemingly right to Mark's community, 40 years after Jesus lived.  
Keep awake.

For you see, Mark's community is in a crisis: the temple has been destroyed.

The city of Jerusalem is under siege.

The Roman army is encamped around them, the factions within the Jewish community are at odds..

Those who tried to escape the city were crucified, some 500 a day, we're told

This community to which Mark writes has been shaken to its core with pain and suffering.

While we might hear these verses and fear the end, an apocalypse is truly a revealing.

They could hear these verses as hopeful, desperately needed, a new beginning.

**Keep awake, for God's love is so powerful** that all creation, the stars in the sky, the fig tree,  
will show signs of the Son's return.

Keep awake. Keep awake.

### **In many ways these three passages are answered by Corinthians:**

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, as the people wait, Paul begins a simple letter with some powerful honesty,  
honesty that feels relevant still today.

He says something like this: Dear people, I give thanks to God because of what I see in you.

You are not lacking in spiritual gifts—you may feel you are lacking, but truth be told, honestly, you have  
what you need for this waiting, for this season.

You'll be strengthened, you will.

For God is faithful."

That's good news I hear this morning: **you may feel like you are lacking, like you don't have the  
needed gifts, but you'll be given the gifts, given the strength, for God is faithful.**

### **You've heard about each of the passages, here's the invitation:**

#### **Our Advent theme is Finding Home.**

The Wednesday evenings in Advent as we worship, we'll use a liturgy created by one of our new members  
who is also a musician and a pastor, Jason Lukis.

The liturgy is about asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants, all who seek refuge.

It includes the line Finding Home.

Join us through this season.

**Some of you remember** how a few years back we focused Advent on the truth that with the birth of Jesus,

God comes to dwell with us: in our homes, our apartments, our dorm rooms.  
That advent in our worship space we replaced the usual worship furniture up front (like the altar and the pulpit) with a living room scene.  
We literally moved in a love seat, an easy chair, a coffee table and books, some modest lamps, a fish bowl with a little fish we named Jean Baptiste.  
That year we remembered how God shows up, how Jesus is born, right where we are.  
This year we're pushing that truth another step with this theme of Finding Home.  
So many of our bible stories, even Jesus' own story, include forced displacement and terror,  
People around the globe and some of us are on the move in search of safety, of home.  
Even in isolation we claim home, we claim family and solidarity.  
Jesus finds a home in our hearts.

**This week we learned** that the son of good friends of our congregation was taken into the custody of ICE, US Immigration, Customs and Enforcement.

He's a dad, he's a spouse, he's son, he's brother, he's a friend, he's an employee.  
We add our laments, our heartbreak, our prayers, our anger at the way this system is causing such suffering for this family and for so many others.  
Tear open the heavens and come, O God, come.  
Finding Home fits here, for that is our prayer,  
that *he* will soon be able to return home to his family.  
That *all* who seek refuge of any sort will be met with love.  
I invite you to pray and act with me and all those finding home.

**Let us close in prayer: O God, we are the clay, you are the potter.**

In the honesty of this Advent season,  
reveal the beautiful and the broken,  
keep us alert to what is needed,  
remind us that we are not lacking, that we have all that is needed to do your work now.  
For you, O God, are faithful.  
In the name of the One who was,  
and the One who is,  
and the One who is to come. Amen.