

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Advent

Sermon Text: Isaiah 63:15 – 64:4



¹⁵ Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me. ¹⁶ For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. ¹⁷ O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of

your heritage. ¹⁸ Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹ We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name. ^{64:1} 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.

Whoever can neither laugh nor cry is dead; whoever can neither shout nor rejoice; whoever can neither despair nor hope is one of the saddest people in the world. “The worst feeling in the world is feeling nothing!” One person said this about their own depression. Such a person is like being in nirvana. That means that they float between living and dying, between being something and being nothing. You have the feeling that something is there but everything is unimportant! It’s like when something itches but you can’t scratch it. The question is haven’t we all become desensitized in this way through mass media and the abundance of information? Instead of being moved by the terrible things that happen in our world, we become indifferent spectators. And so our feeling that we can’t do anything becomes a feeling that we don’t want to do anything! All the suffering in the world doesn’t really affect us! And above all, it doesn’t even concern us that many people approach eternal death because they don’t know Christ. The worst thing about that is that we have become used to the evil. God wants to really bring us out of our complacency with the words of Isaiah. The impressiveness of Isaiah’s words is that they really move him. The suffering of people, as well as his faith in God, are clearly worth mentioning in these verses. It deeply moves him that people don’t believe in God: “They trampled on what is holy!” he cries to God. He can’t believe it. How can God allow people to do such things to that which is holy? Isaiah also couldn’t completely understand why God was silent. God isn’t silent! Absolutely not! He just responds differently than we expect. Instead of showing the blasphemers once and for all who is boss with great power and an ultimate victory, He comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. What happened after was the absolute worst blasphemy there ever was. God, the Judge of the universe was hung on a cross like a criminal. And God allowed all of that. God didn’t rend open the heavens to release the heavenly soldiers onto the earth, instead, He ripped open His own heart and gave His all. Whoever sees all of that can’t feel nothing. Whoever believes in God, who pours out His love onto us, can do nothing other than bring

our reality into connection with this God. Whoever believes in God can do nothing other than to see the many suffering stories of our time and to cry out - "Oh God look down!" Whoever believes in God can do nothing other than to look at all the dead people in the world and to cry out about them: "Oh God, rend open the heavens!" Let Your love pour down on us! Show us that You are there! Show us that Your love still applies to us too!

And then Isaiah truly expects heavenly intervention. He expects that God can and will turn around the course of events. I hear in these words an important question addressed to us modern people. In our time, we are taught from childhood that our world and our lives depend on natural processes. We understand, much better than our ancestors, what the connections are. On the one hand, we became much smarter and know exactly what is possible and what is not possible in our world. That's why we come to terms with the things we can't change and expect an intervention from the authorities that experience tell us will change our lives. Am I sick, then I visit a doctor or hospital. Is something broken in the house, the plumber or electrician should be called. Do I have trouble with a neighbor, a lawyer should settle the controversy. Am I sad, I should go to a psychologist, am I without a job or old, then the government should deal with the problem. Humans are very good at the art of living here on earth. We know exactly what works and what doesn't. But that's exactly why we have become poorer than our ancestors. Because we have lost the art of the impossible. We see it first when we face a completely hopeless situation. When we stand next to the bed of a terminally ill person and the doctors really don't know what to do, we notice it in our speechlessness. We are also now speechless because we don't know how things will continue with the corona pandemic. We forgot to call on God. We forgot to petition and cry to God. We no longer count on God rending open the heavens. We also don't expect God to be able or willing to change the terrible situations in our lives. We also no longer expect the drug addict to be cured or that the God-forsaken will hear God's voice and can praise His name with us. It's no wonder that some say: "Stop telling me about your God. Life is complicated enough without having to get involved with a strange intervention. Just let me make the best out of my own life!"

What do we actually expect from life? And what do we expect from God? Which desires fulfill us? What is so important to us that it touches our innermost being and fills us with burning impatience? Is there something in our lives that urges us to cry out: "O Savior, rend open the heavens?" When we only ever expect the possible, we probably haven't understood much about Advent. Perhaps we should start with a closed heaven. The closed heaven shows us that God and heaven are not accessible, sealed with lock and bolt. Or, like at the time of Adam and Eve – an angel stands at the door to heaven and doesn't let anyone inside. When we pray: "God, rend open heaven," then we ask for deliverance. We ask that lock and bolt be removed and we can see God. In Jesus, we see heaven torn open. We are not in heaven yet but heaven is restored to us. God lives with us. God also doesn't just take away every hardship all at once. But Jesus shares the hardship with us. And He gives us a taste for what is to come. Even now on earth. That's why we can also pray for heaven to come here on earth, just as Jesus taught us: Your kingdom come...or Your name be hallowed not only in heaven but also here on earth...or Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When we pray like this, we pray in faith that the borders between heaven and earth are gone and we are free to come and go. We can enter into God's presence directly. We can be free from the narrow walls of our thoughts and see the vast space of the Eternal God. God opens up this space to us and He encourages us so that we can see heaven.

Where is the path now going? To this heaven! Isaiah opened a wonderful view of this heaven. He sees heaven in the future pouring down like flowing water. And this belief in heaven goes on into the present: All over Germany, you can see candle arches in the windows of houses at this time of year. The rounded arch represents heaven. The nativity scene with the Holy family represents the birth of Jesus. And the candles light up the scene. The candle arch wants to show us what Isaiah already knew. God is here among us. God opens up heaven and lets His presence flow down to us. This God is not yet finished with us. No, His plan for us is only just beginning.

A blessed Advent Season to you all! Amen.