

*Grace & peace from God our Father & our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

The world is a mess. Nothing makes sense anymore. It seems nothing can be counted on. The people in charge only care about their own power and influence; they don't care about the people. Political turmoil peppers the time. Ruling parties grow further and further apart, each side blaming the other for the problems. And no one takes responsibility for the problems facing the world.

Justice doesn't happen in the courts. Regardless of the truth, half-truths and loopholes manipulate the outcome. No one speak out for the innocent.

Violence rules the streets, and more and more innocent blood is spilled every day by the violent or those filled with hate and rage.

The nation itself no longer hold a place of honor in the world. And peace? There is no peace, nor does peace seem within grasp.

*(PAUSE)*

*It sounds kind of familiar doesn't it? But I was not describing our world. Rather, these are Isaiah's observations in the 59th chapter about the world in 537 B.C. to which the people of Israel from Babylon. The world was a sore contrast to the future that the prophet*

*described in Babylon and the people expected. **The mighty, all transforming turning point they expected upon their return to Jerusalem had not materialized.** In fact, the circumstances of those who did return were wretched – a time of poverty, instability, ruin and devastation.*

*They had expected to be a leader among the nations, and **found they had no influence at all.** Those who returned with high hopes of divine restoration and blessing, seeking out a city in which justice and peace and equality and mutual caring exist and thrive, are sorely disappointed. **Israel is not a peaceful and harmonious nation radiating light and salvation outward to the rest of the world, but***

*chaos, social numbness and indifference to others, and a collapse of the government, the economy, and the courts of law.*

In the midst of all this, Israel does not go shopping, have a big meal, light up cigarette, toss down another Silver Bullet, go to the cannabis shop, or sit through more Netflix or NFL. *Israel does not even throw herself numbly into endless work.* In our text for today we see that Israel does none of these things. No, **Israel goes to worship.**

They do not come to hear a Doctor Feel Good, Joel Olstein "God wants you to succeed" sermon. That gives them a lift, or talk about heaven. That's not at all what goes on.

***Israel despairs honestly at her situation.*** The people lament, cry to God, complaining that things are not as they should be. The ***anger is not hidden:*** "Why O lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our hearts, so that we do not fear you?" The ***fear and dread are not covered up,*** "We have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a dirty rag. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind take us away."

Facing a world which is painful and destructive they tell God, "This is not how it is supposed to be!" Israel is not afraid of pulling out the kleenex, and crying in church for all the pain they see and feel. ***Theirs is the voice of those who know profound grief, who are not afraid to speak of their pain, who no longer want to cover it over. They witness to their faithfulness, as they still cling to God.***

Israel remembers far back behind the present trouble, when God had acted in their midst delivering them from the adversity. The people of God remember the name of the God who still rules over this mess, who is Lord in the hurt, and who will yet bring it to a full end. They come to worship to remember who God is even though the situation is not as they would wish it, or will it. God is their only hope.

Within our culture *we are inclined not to speak of our hurt*. It is subversive and calls into question the American Dream where everything is as it should be, where there is no failure or pain. We are a people who even in this place are reluctant to shed a tear or admit the darkness of despair that makes one think thoughts of hopelessness or god forbid ending their life.

We are a people who do not show our despair. We are a people who don't let unhappiness live, who don't acknowledge the pain of the world around us. That is why we put our old people into homes where we don't have to look at them and their pain. That is why people stop coming to church after a death in the family because they don't want their sadness to show. Why people stop coming to church when they lose their job, get divorced, or any other painful crisis of life. We numb ourselves to the pain of life, thinking something is wrong with us because we feel it, and so we completely hide our despair. We no longer even recognize the struggle and the hurt that everyone faces.

The community to which Mark's gospel is written find themselves in much the same situation. Caesar has desecrated the temple, and the Jewish people mount a rebellion. Mark brings them Jesus' words that what appears to be the end is not the end. And so, the proper response is not to take up arms, but to follow the way of the Kingdom more ardently.

Paul's words to the Corinthians which also speak of waiting and being strengthened echo similarly. Remain steadfast for God's kingdom is already present in you, and will come to fruition in God's time and by God's hand.

***We need Advent.*** Advent does not begin with celebration or shopping sprees. Advent is born out of the hurts and pain of the people of God. It is our cry of profound grief and for help, as we share all that brokenness and pain in our lives and world.

*Advent is the season where God's people – the Church – like Israel, hurting as we are in this life and world, look with hope to God's reign among us as the end to all this and the beginning Christ's rule.* Advent is the time at the beginning of the Church year when the people of God recall and remember from our past, behind the present trouble and hurt, the name of the God who having lived as one of us conquered the pain and sin of this world by giving himself on the cross. And we trust that God continues to have control even now. It is the time in the beginning of the year when we anticipate, expect, look forward to God's healing for the world.

*And because the hurt and pain are spoken to our God, whose rule is not in doubt, this community of hurt is profoundly a community of hope –* hope not based on ourselves and our abilities, but on God's mercy and might. We hope passionately that the trouble will end. And that the end of the trouble will come when God returns to take away the hurt and establish a kingdom of well-being. We look forward to the day when God will tear open the sky, come down, make the world quake with fear, and destroy everything as we know it, so that He can make it new.

That is what the people of Israel are doing in this morning's Old Testament reading from Isaiah. They, the people of despair, are crying and complaining to God:

*Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, So that the mountains would quake at your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood and fire cause water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, So that nations might tremble at your presence!*

*"Enough, Dear God, Enough! Come down for we cannot bear to hurt this way any longer."* This is also the church's prayer. We prayed it this morning, *"Stir up your power, O Lord and Come."* It is our prayer at every Communion, *"Come Lord Jesus, Come Holy Spirit."*

***AMEN!!!***