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Christ the King Lutheran Church

Isaiah 64:1-9  
Mark 13:24-37

“Wake up!”

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

These are the commands we hear at the beginning of Advent. They are startling, sudden, and urgent. As we begin this season of waiting, today’s scripture urges that our waiting not be some passive thing. Advent is not a season of twiddling our thumbs and idly counting down the days until Christmas.

No – Advent invites an active, expectant, bold kind of waiting. It is preparation. It is a time when we open our eyes to see and our ears to hear; when we open our hearts to the possibility of God’s reign of peace breaking into our broken world.

And who is it that helps us to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the present-day reality of God’s work of justice and love among us? Well, biblically and historically, this has been the work of prophets.

Each year during Advent, we are blessed by the words of one particular biblical prophet – the prophet Isaiah. And today we are doubly blessed that we have musician John Hermanson with us, who has given fresh voice and expression to Isaiah’s ancient prophecies.

Listen to these words of the prophet, calling us out of fear and into hope. Listen to the prophet, who imagines a way forward where none seems possible.

*Say to those with fearful hearts,  
“Be strong, do not fear, your God will come!”  
“Your God will come!”*

*Blind eyes will be open, deaf ears will hear,  
“Your God will come, your God will come!”*

*"Your God will come!"*

*And then the lame will leap like a deer  
and the mute tongues shout for joy.  
Water will rush from the wilderness,  
and streams from the desert.*

*Say to those with fearful hearts,  
"Be strong, do not fear, your God will come!"  
"Your God will come!"  
And in the haunts where jackals once laid,  
grass and reeds will grow.  
Water will rush from the wilderness,  
and streams from the desert.*

*And then the lame will leap like a deer  
and the mute tongues shout for joy,  
"Your God will come!" (Isaiah 35)*

**"Blind eyes will be open, deaf ears will hear" – "Your God will come!"**

These are words of promise, aren't they? But they are also meant to shake us awake! The blind eyes and deaf ears Isaiah sings about are all of ours – our senses so easily become dulled by the present reality; we blindly accept the unwritten rules of the dominant culture in which we live.

And what are these rules?

They are rules that tell us to fear strangers, especially those from other cultures and lands.

They whisper that you must look out only for yourself and what is yours: spend your time going for the quick profit rather than the long, hard work of loving another person.

These rules tell us daily that we are hopelessly divided as a people, that there is no way forward, that there are certain possibilities and outcomes that we can't even discuss together because any conversation is so entrenched in tribal identity and party allegiance.

They are rules that say we cannot own up to our brokenness and pain with others, that we must pretend as though we have it all together, that we, in fact, have no need for a Savior.

Thankfully, the prophets do not play by these rules. Instead, they imagine another reality, another vision, of what's possible. They ask us, "Why do you blindly accept the way things are when you have faith in a God who has promised to make all things new?"

Listen to these words of the prophet, helping us to see a world where we live at peace and don't practice war anymore.

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
To the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us to walk in his paths  
And the law will go out from Zion.*

*We will not train for war anymore.  
We'll not train for war.  
We will beat our swords into plows  
and we'll walk in the name of the Lord.*

*We will sit every one of us  
under our own vine and fig tree  
Saying, "No one can make me afraid  
for the Lord Almighty is with me!"*

*We will not train for war anymore.  
We'll not train for war.  
We will beat our swords into plows  
and we'll walk in the name of the Lord. (Isaiah 2 and Micah 4)*

"We will sit under our own vine and fig tree, saying no one shall make me afraid for the Lord our God is with me."

A world with war may sound inevitable, but is it? Why do we daily choose to believe that war is necessary rather than that peace is possible? Whose reality will we submit to – the world's, or God's?

Prophets return us to the story of God's activity in history – it's a history of liberation, of love, of breaking chains and tearing down walls.

Prophets like Isaiah remind us that there is another way forward, a better, truer reality that is breaking into our broken one.

Though we feel surrounded by darkness, there is a light.  
Though forces of evil and hatred threaten to devour us, there is a way of love. Wake up!

But here's what prophets also remind us...that waking up, at first, doesn't always feel the best. You know what I'm talking about.

When the light hits my eyes after a long night of sleep, it hurts! I don't like it. The light is disorienting. It takes a while to see clearly.

Notice, for example, the pain and disorientation and distress of institutions these days as we wake up to a culture of sexual assault and harassment in workplaces. Though some of us need to do the hard work of seeing and owning up to this culture, many of the women in our lives have seen the truth of it all too clearly for far too long. Bringing these stories into the light is right, and it is of God.

Isaiah, after all, was saying "Wake up" to people not all that different from us. He was addressing people returning home after a long exile, who now needed to make peace between those who stayed. Insiders and outsiders trying to be community again.

He was saying "Wake up" to faithful people in the land who worshipped God but who had built a society where the rich got richer and the poor were forgotten.

He was saying "Wake up" to those who were suffering, who were grieving, who struggled to see God's presence in the midst of immense pain.

Listen to the words of the prophet, who shakes us out of darkness: the darkness of pain, the darkness of injustice, the darkness of alienation and loneliness.

*You walking in darkness,  
you living in the land of night,  
you have seen a light!*

*You walking in darkness,  
you who are living in a land of night,  
you have seen a light!*

*Boots worn in battle,  
coats rolled in blood  
Will be fuel for the fire!*

*You walking in darkness,  
you who are living in a land of night,  
you have seen a light!*

*For to us a child is born,  
a son is given,  
The Prince of Peace,*

*Who shattered the oak of burden,  
broke the oppressor's rod!*

*For you, who are walking in darkness  
You, who are living in a land of night,  
You have seen a light! (Isaiah 9)*

“You, walking in darkness; you, who are living in a land of night, you have seen a light!” We have seen a light. Christ, our light, is here. Open your eyes to see it, your ears to hear it, your hearts to receive it. The peace of Christ is with you. Amen.