

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Advent, December 2, 2018

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 69:1-4, 64:4-5, 67:1-4, 604:1-3, 604:4.
Lessons: Isaiah 63:1-19, 2 Peter 3:1-18, Mark 13:31-37.
Sermon Text: Isaiah 64:1-8
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Advent is preparation for Christ's coming. We really must think of Advent in connection with Christ coming twice. In four weeks we will celebrate his coming to earth as a holy, sinless infant to suffer for our sins. The hymn tells us: "Once He came in blessing, All our ills redressing; Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy; Bore the cross to save us, Hope and freedom gave us." (The Lutheran Hymnal 74:1)

Christ will also come a second time. He "shall come to judge the quick and the dead"—the living and the dead. For all people still living, his second coming will be like a thief in the night. We do not know when he will come, and so we must be ready and want to be ready every day for his coming.

Our lessons and text today remind us especially that we are all waiting for Christ to come and deliver us from this vale of tears we now call our home.

Do you remember waiting for something special to happen? Children, are you now waiting for something special to happen? Perhaps you are waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Sometimes we feel that we just can't wait.

All of us are probably waiting for something special to happen, sometimes patiently waiting, sometimes impatiently waiting.

But we must wait. The greatest blessing from God we are waiting for is deliverance from this world of sin and evil. We do not have to wait for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. That we already have. Today God reminds us

CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.
KEEP WATCH!

1. Like the people in Isaiah's time, we may wonder when the Lord is coming.
2. Like Isaiah, we make confession of our sins.
3. Christ's second coming will be a coming to judge the living and the dead.

The words we are looking at today are part of a prayer. Isaiah has just written: "*Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.*" Isaiah 63:15-17 (NIV)

Isaiah is pleading for God to come and rescue them – the physical descendants of Abraham. He is looking for some dramatic appearance of God, their Father, and it seems like God has abandoned them. But he still calls God "*our Father*"! God had chosen Abraham and his descendants to be the family through whom the Savior would be born. Like all believers, we believe that God is our Father because he created us and believers are "*all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*" Galatians 3:26 (NIV)

Isaiah's prayer goes on: "*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your*

name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.” That picture is exactly how God will come and destroy this present earth and all the material things we hold so dear.

We might think of the terrible fires that have consumed acres and acres of the United States this year, including the terrible winds and fires destroying parts of California in recent months. We might think of volcanoes rumbling and trembling and spewing huge clouds of volcanic ash into the air.

Isaiah had written previously about that final coming: *“All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”* Isaiah 34:4 (NIV)

In this prayer, Isaiah reminds us that *“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.”* In those ways God has always been there. No other so-called “god” could do anything close to what the true God does.

This prayer also contains a confession of sin: *“But when we continued to sin against [your ways, O God], you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you.”*

Because of our sins, all humans are *“an unclean thing,”* (KJV) what one writer described as like the uncleanness of leprosy, and all the deeds which men might consider good, righteous and deserving of praise *“are like filthy rags,”* loathsome objects, an abomination in his sight. We are like dried leaves heaped up for destruction, just as decades ago we used to rake and burn leaves in the fall.

Yes, at times, God has *“hidden [his] face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.”* We are warned to *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”* Isaiah 55:6 (NIV)

The people in Isaiah’s time were waiting and looking for the Lord to come. They had yet to see the coming of the Savior, and they were waiting and waiting. It would be nearly 700 years before Christ came! In Isaiah’s time God’s chosen people were terribly oppressed by their enemies.

In the chapters before our text, Isaiah frames the coming of the Savior in terms of being rescued from their enemies, their people being prosperous, and having their physical land in Canaan being again made bountiful, made their own land without a foreign nation oppressing them. These were pictures they could understand.

We today approach God in the same prayerful way. Our words of prayer may not be exactly the same but we are praying for the coming of Christ – his second coming – in the same desperate way.

We New Testament Christians can look at Peter’s words in our Epistle lesson: *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”* 2 Peter 3:10 (NIV)

We tend to frame the second coming of Christ either in terms of physical, temporal death leading to eternal life, or of Christ coming instantly, unexpectedly, in the heavens on judgment day.

But sometimes we have mixed feelings about the second coming of Christ. Sometimes we don’t want to leave this world and some days and times we want it all to be over right now. Some days Satan and the world look so inviting to us – to our Old Adam – that we don’t want to leave. But God will take us away from this world, just as he has taken all believers before us to be with himself in heaven, awaiting the glorious resurrection of their bodies.

But despite their sad feelings, and sometimes even being angry at God as if he is ignoring or abandoning them, Isaiah’s people praise God! *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”* The believer, today too, despite all the difficulties that face him and her on earth, confesses: *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*

We have the picture of a potter taking a useless lump of clay and making it into something beautiful and useful.

All who believe are Abraham's children. All who believe are also descendants of Abraham. Abraham and his grandson Jacob, called here "Israel" are long gone and because they are in heaven with God they do not know their descendants on earth. They do not see what is happening on earth, for in heaven ***"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*** Revelation 21:4 (NIV)

All who believe acknowledge God's mercy. We even stress that at the end of the Lord's Prayer, confessing that God has all power and glory.

And, we, like the people in Isaiah's time, are pleading that God come quickly to deliver us.

But we must make no mistake that God is coming – the Savior Jesus Christ is coming. He's coming – figuratively, when we celebrate his birth on Christmas.

He is also coming literally – to judge all people. On that unknown day, everyone must acknowledge Christ as King, as God's Son, as Savior, although it will be too late for unbelievers to be saved. They will have no choice but to realize that they missed out on eternal life in not believing in the glorious Son of God who paid the price for all their sins. Scripture warns us ***"whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** Mark 16:16 (NIV)

But Scripture also assures us: ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*** John 3:16 (KJV)

Because we believe those words, we must be ready at any time for Christ to come. We struggle to follow Christ's words in John: ***"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*** John 8:31-32 (KJV)

Think of the joy and freedom we shall have in heaven! Listen to God's words:

"As it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 12-16 (NIV)

Because the mind of Christ is in us, let us be ready every day for Christ's coming, because he told us during his humiliation on earth: ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.:What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*** Mark 13:32-37 (NIV)

We pray Lord, quickly come! We read at the very end of the Bible: ***"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."*** Revelation 22:20-21 (NIV)