

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Advent 1

December 3, 2023

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

***Come, King Jesus, and save your people!***

Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down. Mountains then would quake because of your presence. <sup>2</sup>As fire ignites stubble and as fire makes water boil, make your name known to your adversaries. Then nations would quake in your presence. <sup>3</sup>You did amazing things that we did not expect. You came down. Mountains quaked because of your presence. <sup>4</sup>From ancient times no one has heard. No ear has understood. No eye has seen any god except you, who goes into action for the one who waits for him. <sup>5</sup>You meet anyone who joyfully practices righteousness, who remembers you by walking in your ways! But you were angry because we sinned. We have remained in our sins for a long time. Can we still be saved? <sup>6</sup>All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. <sup>7</sup>There is no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. So you hid your face from us. You made us melt by the power of our guilt. <sup>8</sup>But now, LORD, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not be angry, LORD, without limit. Do not remember our guilt forever. Please look closely. All of us are your people.

—Isaiah 64:1-9

It's 2:00 in the morning. You wake up from your sleep, and you can't fall back to sleep. Your mind is cycling through the problems you are facing in life. That classmate is picking on you, again. He said some pretty nasty things about you on Snapchat. You feel the pain. It affects your life. Your grades are beginning to slip. You can't seem to concentrate at all.

Times are tough at work. Your boss is imposing some tough rules upon you. The company's new policies state that you must call your fellow employees by their self-designated pronouns. Your coworkers know that you are a Christian, and they look down on you because of it. You feel targeted, alone.

Life is not going well at home. It just seems as though you and your spouse are not seeing eye to eye. You don't understand what's going on, but you don't like it. You are concerned about your children, too. They seem very enthralled with Artificial Intelligence. It's intriguing what AI can do, but they don't see the dangers. They don't see the pitfalls and the destruction. Everything seems too chaotic and out of control.

To add to the problems, your body is constantly in pain. You want relief, but it just doesn't come. You wish you could sleep and get rest, but the pain is too much. So, you are up in the middle of the night with your mind constantly at work.

What do you do in moments like this? When you are plagued with problems in life, what do you do? I'm going to guess that you do what so many Christians have done in the past. You probably do what Isaiah does in our text for today. You pray. You go to the Lord in prayer. You place your cares and concerns before him, and you pray.

And maybe, just maybe, those prayers get to be pretty intense. Maybe your silent prayers have become audible prayers as you fling your words toward God. You may have even wondered if God is listening to you at all. Things have gotten so bad, and it seems as though God has barricaded himself in heaven and doesn't even listen. Do you ever wonder if the Lord sees? Does he know? Does he understand what you are going through?

Perhaps your prayers have become so intense that you have joined Isaiah's plea, **"Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down."** Lord, come down. Don't barricade yourself from me. I'm in agony. Rip open the heavens and come down. Tear open the heavens and step into this world and save your people. We know who you are. We know the power you have. We know you can save and make everything right. **"Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down. Mountains then would quake because of your presence. <sup>2</sup>As fire ignites stubble and as fire makes water boil, make your name known to your adversaries. Then nations would quake in your presence. <sup>3</sup>You did amazing things that we did not expect. You came down. Mountains quaked because of your presence."**

Lord, we know your power. We know what you can do. With an outstretched hand, you rescued your ancient people from the powerful Egyptians. They walked out of Egypt and were free because you came down and freed them. You rescued them from obstinate Pharaoh who held his oppressive hand on them. You opened the Red Sea so they could walk on dry land, and you freed them. You took care of them. You sustained them in the wilderness by providing food and water for them. You came down. You came down with power and majesty.

Your people saw it and trembled. You shook Mt. Sinai. The thunder cracked and the fire flashed. Dark clouds enveloped the mountain. The people saw. They knew. You had come down. Lord, you delivered your people in the past. Deliver me now!

I know your power. I know your love. I've seen it in Jesus. Jesus came down. You ripped open the heavens and your angels appeared in the night sky. They declared what I need to hear. **"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace."** We need peace right now. Deliver us now. We know you can.

Oh, but we don't always see how. We don't always know how you will make everything work out for good. Who could know your ways? Jesus rides into Jerusalem, not looking like a victorious King, but as a humble servant. We hear the voices of the people, and so we also pray, **"Hosanna! Save us, Lord. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"** Jesus is our King. He has come to save his people.

But who could know his ways of saving? **"From ancient times no one has heard. No ear has understood. No eye has seen any god except you, who goes into action for the one who waits for him. You meet anyone who joyfully practices righteousness, who remembers you by walking in your ways!"** Lord, we're suffering right now. Things are not good on the home front. It just feels as though everything we do is a burden. We can't see the way out. Why do my coworkers conspire against me? Why do my family and friends disrespect me? I am your child, Lord. I want to walk in your ways. But it seems as though you do not listen. It seems as though you have turned from me. Why? Why, Lord? Why? Have you turned your eyes away from me because of my sin?

Oh, I would understand that. I get it, Lord. We're not perfect. We have sinned. We have sinned. Have you turned away because of sin? **"You were angry because we sinned. We have remained in our sins for a long time. Can we still be saved? <sup>6</sup> All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. <sup>7</sup> There is no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. So you hid your face from us. You made us melt by the power of our guilt."** That I understand, Lord. I see my sin. My transgressions are always before me.

You did that with your people time and time again. When they rebelled against you, you brought enemies against them. You oppressed them and brought problems into their life. I can understand if you would do that to me. My thoughts are not always pure. I have some very dark thoughts that flutter through my mind. My heart gets angry. I worry. And I don't always trust you and your ways.

Even when I do something that looks and feels so right, I know my deeds are only dirty, bloody, filthy cloths that are tossed down the toilet. I've experienced it, Lord. We do something really nice for our families. Actually, we do a lot of nice things for our families. Oh, Lord, but our motives are not always pure. The thoughts flash in our minds as we were doing it, "Why can't others do nice things for me?"

I see it, Lord. I'm just like a withered leaf. It falls to the ground dead, no longer connected to the tree for life. The wind blows, and the rustling leaves tumble on the ground without any way to stop. They are trampled underfoot, crushed to the ground. I get it, Lord. That is certainly what I deserve. I do not come to you in this earnest prayer because I am so righteous. No, I am broken. I know I have nothing to offer you.

But I do not despair. No. I know your promises. **"But now, LORD, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not be angry, LORD, without limit. Do not remember our guilt forever. Please look closely. All of us are your people."**

You created us, Lord. You gave us our bodies and life. Your hands formed us like a potter forms the clay, and so you can heal us. We have seen and know your greatest act of power and grace. You came down only to walk up a mountain which quaked with your glory and might. It looked awful. The perfect Son of God walked with a load of wood on his back. But the greatest weight he bore was not his own. No. It was my sin, our sin. And he offered his hands outstretched to take our punishment and guilt away. Your hand transferred our sin to Jesus. He is our King! He has come down to save his people. There is nothing that stands between us, Lord. Nothing that keeps you from hearing our pleas. Our sins and guilt are removed because King Jesus came down to save his people.

And now? Now I know who you are. Now I know who I am. You are my Father! You are my Father! You have brought life to this lifeless body. Your Spirit is living within me. You have made me a new creation. Even though we have times of doubt and fear and worry and pain, you keep us in faith. We trust you, Lord. Help us see through the eyes of faith.

So, we pray to you, O Lord! Come, King Jesus, and save your people once again. Save us from ourselves. Save us from our enemies. Save us from destruction and despair. Save us from pain and agony. Save us by taking us home to heaven. Save us by ripping open the heavens and coming down once again. Save us by coming as our glorious, victorious King. Tear open the heavens and come down.

Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.