

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 29, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Isaiah 64:1-9 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In this second section (chapters 35, 40-66) of Isaiah, Isaiah moves from the judgment of the exile to the promise of restoration for the remnant who remain faithful during the exile. The restoration will not, however, be a resumption of the same old way of following the covenant but God will do a "new" thing (43:19). Like a birth, however, this "new thing" will come through ordeal. Just as the people witnessed the power of God the wilderness before they came to the promised land, the remnant will witness the awesome power of God. The remnant will be reshaped into a new people. The iniquities that caused the exile will be taken away and all their sins shall be remembered no more. In order to remove these iniquities, however, the people must be as yielding as clay in the potter's hands.

Isaiah 64:8 O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter
Have you ever tried to shape dry clay? What about wet clay?
Do you resist change or do you seek God's will?
Do we allow the waters of grace to soften our hearts to God?
Does a softened heart change the way we approach Christmas?
What if we open ourselves up to the wonder of this Christmas rather than nostalgia of Christmas past?

Commentary on Mark 13:24-37 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

It is difficult to read this passage outside of the context in which it was written. Traditionally regarded as the scribe of Peter, the Gospel of Mark is written during the time of Nero and the destruction of the Temple. It was during this time that Rome had four different emperors ending with Vespasian who led the campaign against the Jewish people. The question by Jesus' disciples about the destruction of the Temple is very much on the mind of the early church during this time of political upheaval. Along with predicting that these events must occur, Jesus promises that none of his sheep will be lost. These sheep, however, must look for the signs and be ready for Jesus' return. Even though he says "this generation will not pass away" but rather will be gathered from the four winds, Jesus says that even the Son does not know the day or hour (see Jewish wedding custom). Over time, the gospel message has been transformed from that original audience trying to explain the difficult times to the need of every generation to be anxiously awaiting Jesus' return whenever that may happen.

Mark 13:33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.
Is it hard to be as excited about Christmas as you were as a child?
How do you hear the message in fresh and new ways?
After nearly 2000 years, has the church fallen asleep waiting?
What will you do this year to awaken your faith and anticipation?

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In the classic Greek letter writing style, Paul begins by announcing the sender or senders, the recipient, and a welcome in the first three verses. Paul combines the traditional Jewish greeting of "peace" or shalom of God with the notion of grace given through Christ. The next section of thanksgiving introduces the major themes to be addressed in the letter. Paul begins by giving thanks for the "grace of God" that has been given to the church. The theme of grace is then tied to spiritual gifts not only for enrichment but also to strengthen the congregation. This grace and the spiritual gifts are the Holy Spirit are needed "as you wait for the revealing of our Lord".

1 Corinthians 1:7 you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What grace do you need this Christmas?

Do you need God's help dealing with challenges of the year or the busyness of the season?

Where will you find faith, hope, and love in Christmas this year?

Will you be ready for the revealing of our Lord?

Sermon "Are You Fatigued?" (*Sermon Video*)

It has almost been nine months since the global pandemic was declared (March 11). If it was a pregnancy, it would almost be over but instead we are told that wait another three to six months. On top of this, the election which should have been over in the first week of November is still being challenged and we wait. This waiting is having a toll on people of all ages and regions. Fatigue is leading to depression and a feeling of hopelessness. One symptom of depression is an unwillingness to go to sleep and then an increasing inability to wake up leading to more fatigue. In the midst of this reality, Jesus tells us to "Keep awake".

While Jesus states that he does not know when he would return, he did anticipate that his followers would become tired of waiting. Not bored but tired. When we have to work at repetitive tasks, fatigue sets in. It is like driving across the long vast prairie of the Texas panhandle or counting change gathered from a noisy offering. The monotony of the task begins to take a mental and emotional toll even when the task itself is not physically demanding. Waiting can be exhausting. Jesus tells us to "Keep awake" even in the midst of waiting.

At times fatigue can become life threatening whether it is behind the wheel of a car or swimming. Spending the summers on the coast, you learn to become a fairly good swimmer but even the best swimmers can experience fatigue when fighting the current. One important lesson to learn is how to float. Floating gives the body a respite before resuming the fight against the current. The key to floating is to relax the muscles. This is easier said than done. Having faith that God made us to float is tested as the water begins to surround the face. If fear sets in, however, the muscles will begin to tighten and then it is impossible to float. Floating is an act of faith.

Isaiah proclaims that we are the clay in the hands of the potter. Not dry and brittle clay but soft clay that the potter can shape. Like the swimmer's muscles, we must have faith and relax into the shaping hands of the potter. Letting go, however, is difficult when we are battling fatigue. A natural reaction to fatigue is to retreat to old habits and routines. These old habits and traditions, however, are some of the reasons for the initial fatigue and only adds to our stress. In order to keep awake, we need to let go of those stressors that make our fatigue grow. This is more than just avoiding bad news and exercising (not bad ideas). If we are to truly relax and let the potter do something new, then we must lean into the gifts God has given us for waiting.

Paul tells the Corinthians that we "are not lacking in any spiritual gift" while we wait. Some of these spiritual gifts are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Rather than focusing on Christmas decorations and holiday customs, what if we decorate our homes and our hearts with these spiritual gifts. As these gifts flow through ourselves and our family, we just might discover a new and refreshing life in the routine of Christmas preparation. This new energy dispels our fatigue as we become open to what the potter is doing rather than what we think we should be doing. What better way to prepare for the Christ child than to fill our lives with patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control. Therefore, relax and trust in the gifts God has already given you and soon the fatigue of this world will fade away.