

“Advent of Hope”

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*1<sup>st</sup> Sun. in Advent*

Isaiah 64:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence...                      Isaiah 64:1*

Let us pray... O God,

In the midst of troubled times, help us find the grace of your presence and  
the courage to stay on the path towards your glorious Beloved Community.

Amen

Ferguson, Missouri has become synonymous

with the crisis of race relations in America – racism in our country;  
and as a Christian minister, I must address this issue...

“One plus one equals two” – arithmetic is simple enough – logical enough,  
but then you add people to the equation and things are not so obvious.

“Two wrongs don’t make a right”,

but after too many ‘wrongs’, we better start making things ‘right’.

It is wrong for young people to be taught not to trust the police;

and it is wrong for police not to be trustworthy.

It is wrong to take the law into one’s own hands –

like rioting after the rule of law has been applied;

and it is wrong not to apply that law in equal measure for all citizens –

like a juried trial.

It is wrong to scapegoat and sacrifice human beings;

and it is wrong to neglect the least of these – the minority in our midst...

The absolute facts of the case are that another unarmed black teenager  
was killed by a white adult with a gun after a confrontation.

To what extent fear, anger, and hatred were involved with either individual  
is anybody’s – and everybody’s guess.

To what extent are ongoing poverty and indiscriminate violence  
also factors in this breakdown of the social contract

that police are to protect the citizens of the community they serve.

The prophet Isaiah said,

*O 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 the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,*

*so that the nations might tremble at your presence!                      Isa. 64:1-2*

Willard, p.2

Later in this passage, Isaiah acknowledges there has been some sinful behavior on the part of Israel.

The Common English Bible puts it in a way we might expect, which says:

*But you were angry when we sinned; you hid yourself when we did wrong.*

*Isa. 64:5<sup>b</sup>*

However, in the New Revised Standard Version of this text,

Isaiah seems to indict God as having some responsibility in the state of affairs at that time, when he says:

*But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.*

*Isa. 64:5<sup>b</sup>*

We need God's presence. We need God's guidance.

If God isn't there for us, what should be expected of us?

Yet that argument is circular, because it brings us back to our responsibility to be looking for God – to be looking for that guidance.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus gives advice by putting it this way:

'Watch.'

Mark 13:37<sup>c</sup>

We are now in the midst of an "apocalypse" – not necessarily *The* Apocalypse, but an apocalypse just the same.

The word 'apocalypse' means 'revelation', or the revealing of a truth

and what we are seeing happening is a bill come due that has long been neglected.

Martin Luther King, Jr. put it in terms of a bad check that had been handed to African-Americans that they came to redeem in Washington, DC

back in the summer of 1963.

Yet Dr. King also said, *But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.*

<http://www.ushistory.org/documents/i-have-a-dream.htm>

The African-American community

has been invisible in the Great Recession.

We have heard about middle-class families – presumably white, who have suffered the loss of jobs, foreclosure of their homes, and relentless debt.

We haven't really heard about black and Latino and Native American families that were already impoverished.

We haven't really heard or seen the effects of the one-two punch of no opportunity and no hope for escaping poverty – until now.

The head of this festering wound is

the collision of racial profiling vs 'gangsta' culture

and the crisis of criminality vs police intimidation.

The immediate fix is to reach across the abyss with open arms that are unarmed.

There are stories about Lt. Jerry Lohr of the St. Louis County Police department who has been doing just that to help ease tensions

between protestors in Ferguson and the civil authorities.

Willard, p.3

*He never wears riot gear, even when he wades into a group of protesters to answer questions, resolve disputes or listen to a stream of insults.*

*Protesters at the gates ask for him by name...*

*Black residents [in Ferguson] have long said that their outrage after [Michael] Brown's killing stemmed from*

*the nearly all-white Ferguson police force's poor community relations and what they said was its abusive and racially targeted practices.*

*Lieutenant Lohr, to many of the protesters, is evidence that*

*law enforcement officials have improved community relations at a divisive time.*

*[Lt. Lohr himself said,]*

*"Allowing people to talk on a one-on-one level does a lot as far as building bridges...*

*They may not agree with what I'm doing,*

*but now they at least know my name and my face.*

*I'm human again. They realize that I'm a person. I'm not just a uniform.*

*We have to bridge this gap."*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/28/us/officer-defused-eruptions-as-crowds-grew-volatile.html?partner=msft\\_msn](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/28/us/officer-defused-eruptions-as-crowds-grew-volatile.html?partner=msft_msn)

*Sound familiar? When you know someone, it makes a difference.*

Before the protests, before the grand jury decision not to prosecute

Officer Darren Wilson for the death of Michael Brown,

his father, Michael Brown, Sr. made this video statement:

*My family & I are hurting. Our region is hurting.*

*I thank you for lifting your voices to end racial profiling and police intimidation.*

*But hurting others or destroying property is not the answer.*

*No matter what the grand jury decides,*

*I do not want my son's death to be in vain.*

*I want it to lead to incredible change – positive change.*

*Change that makes the St. Louis region better for everyone.*

*We live here together. This is our home.*

*We are stronger united.*

*Continue to lift your voices with us and let's work together*

*to heal to create lasting change for all people, regardless of race.*

*Thank you.*

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10152914771168812&set=vb.86680728811&type=2&theater>

Yet, when the verdict came down not to indict the policeman,

Mr. Brown's words were not enough to prevent the protests in Ferguson – both violent and nonviolent, which continue.

Willard, p.4

It is not God who demands sacrifice –  
that is something we do to ourselves in the guise of street justice  
or the expedient financial bottom line.

One plus one equals two seems logical enough for business as usual,  
just like taking ‘an eye for eye’ in court.

But there’s a multiplier of bad business on Black Friday  
to get our attention that we are in the midst of an apocalypse –  
a revelation of injustice and a long overdue response.

Two wrongs don’t make a right, but after too many wrongs,  
we need to start making things right.

The example to follow is Christ himself who confronted the powers  
of both the Roman authorities and the fickle crowd  
and we are seeing some individuals trying to *bridge this gap*,  
like Christ.

The promise of the Advent of the Son of Man – the True Heir of Humanity,  
is usually prefaced by a period of trial and tribulation –  
which serve as the birth pangs for God’s Kingdom to come.

Then, there is the arrival of Christ in glory with all the angelic multitudes  
to usher in a time of prosperity over poverty,  
sanity in place of mental and spiritual distress,  
and nonviolence over violence.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem  
and as a vulnerable little baby, he was laid down in a stable at night  
when there was no room anywhere else.

Later, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – mocking the powers,  
with his vulnerability.

Crucified, dead, and buried, he came back to life to mock death.

He told his disciples then that he would send the Holy Spirit  
as a Counselor for them and the generations to come.

We still have the promise that he himself will return to judge humanity  
and set things right.

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...*

In the meantime, we have a job to do:

“Two wrongs don’t make a right”, but after too many ‘wrongs’,  
we must start making things ‘right’.

Amen

*Our lesson today is from Isaiah 64:1-9, in which the Prophet Isaiah calls for God to be present like the ancient times, to forgive and renew the community...*

- [1] O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
[2] as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
- [3] When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
- [4] From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.
- [5] You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
- [6] We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
- [7] There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
- [8] Yet, O Lord, you are our Father[, our Abba];  
we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.
- [9] Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

*Let us be guided and challenged by these words.*

Mark 13:24-37

[Jesus said,]

<sup>24</sup>“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,

<sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds  
with great power and glory.

<sup>27</sup>And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds,  
from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup>“From the fig tree learn its lesson:

as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves,  
you know that summer is near.

<sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place,  
you know that he is near, at the very gates.

<sup>30</sup>Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away  
before all these things take place.

<sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away,  
but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup>“But of that day or that hour no one knows,  
not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father[, the Abba].

<sup>33</sup>Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come.

<sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home  
and puts his servants in charge, each with his work,  
and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

<sup>35</sup>Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come,  
in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—

<sup>36</sup>lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

<sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.”