

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR DECEMBER 3, 2023

Isaiah 64:1-9

- This passage comes from Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66), in a time during the Exile when some question whether God's restoration of Israel will happen. Here, we hear the lament, the cry, the prayer, that God somehow comes to the people and restores them, even if they do not deserve it.
- This lament offers to us a freedom to express our own despair and frustration. When we feel that God has abandoned us or turned upon us, Isaiah's cry invites us to shake our fist and demand that God act. But keep this in mind: the passage also proclaims that God acts in ways that "no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen." And be ready: God may be acting in and through us.
- The line, "we are the clay, and you are our potter," is not a line of comfort. It expresses a plea that God not destroy God's creation, God's people. "You made us," Isaiah cries, "Do not shatter us!"

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

- The opening of the Prayer of the Day – "Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come" – come from Psalm 80:2. By praying this line throughout Advent, we are invited to perceive the coming of Jesus not just in history but also in our present circumstances and in our future.
- The psalm pursues the same themes and feelings found in Isaiah 64: calling upon God to act even when the people feel abandoned by God. We again are invited to express our own frustrations and anger.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

- This passage reflects two common elements found in Paul's epistles: a greeting ("Grace to you and peace ...") and a thanksgiving ("I give thanks to my God always for you because") With the exception of Galatians, which lacks a thanksgiving, we can find these elements in any of Paul's letters.
- Many contemporary churches, knowledge is downplayed in favor of spirituality. But Paul says that knowledge of every kind is to be enriched in Christ. How can we be enriched in speech and knowledge?
- We are also called to strengthen the witness of Christ among us - both the witness about who Jesus is and how Jesus witnessed about God. As we strengthen the living of that witness among us, we discover all of our spiritual gifts. What are your spiritual gifts? How might God strengthen that gift to reveal Jesus?

Mark 13:24-37

- Mark 13 is known as "Mark's Little Apocalypse." It begins with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which scholars use to date the writing of Mark to just before or just after the destruction of the Temple in 68 AD. That historical context explains why Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." The first hearers of Mark's Gospel would know about the Temple's destruction and how those events have come to pass.
- But this passage refers to a cataclysmic Coming of Christ. So, what does Jesus mean when he says that this generation – meaning his own and that of his disciples – will not pass until this happens? Here are three possible ways to understand this passage with respect to us:
 1. These events may refer not to the Second Coming of Jesus but to the First Coming. Jesus later says, "Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or cockcrow, or at dawn" This chapter occurs right before the arrest, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Consider the events that are about to be described: the Last Supper occurs in the evening; Jesus prays in Gethsemane in the middle of the night (at midnight??); Peter denies Jesus at cockcrow; God raises Jesus from the dead at dawn. Jesus comes at unexpected times and in unexpected ways in his First Coming.

2. These events may refer not to an end of the world but to the end of our lives. We all face an end of the world when we die. We do not know the day or hour. We only know that the day or hour will come. When it does, our sun will be darkened, our moon will no longer give its light. Are we awake and prepared for that coming? What does it mean to be awake and prepared?
3. These events may refer to an eternally present **this generation**. In other words, Jesus comes to us not just in history, not just at our deaths, not just at the end of time. Jesus comes to us in small and large ways all the time. Jesus comes to us in unexpected ways, whether at dawn or in the middle of the night. Are we ready? Are we awake? Are we ready to make a space for Jesus when Jesus makes an entry into our lives? Into our communities?