

1 Advent 2014

The Way It Is

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

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- ✘ There are a number of recurring themes that crop up in the men's group:
 - ✓ Immigration (and what does it mean to care for the stranger)
 - ✓ Prison (in its many manifestations: death penalty, three strikes as justice issue; the command of Jesus to visit those in prison.)
 - ✓ Economic justice (is capitalism ordained by God as the best system of determining wages and profits)
- ✘ Another theme that keeps surfacing is reflected in the first two words of today's Collect: "Almighty God..."
 - ✓ Just those two words drive some to distraction.
 - ✓ If God is almighty, then why doesn't she do something about the awful state of affairs we're in?
 - ✓ For many people, life is filled with pain and loss
 - With cruelty and injustice
 - Wars and natural disasters
 - Loss of jobs, loss of home, loss of husband or wife
 - Loss of kids to addiction or accident
 - ✓ How are we to think of God's response to this pain and loss? What should our response be?
 - This indeed is one of the more fundamental questions of religion—any religion.
 - And we find in today's readings, at least three ways to answer this question.
- ✘ The easy answer is to say, "Well that's just the way it is."
 - ✓ We see this in the lament from Isaiah:
 - Why even try?
 - Whether we do good or bad doesn't make a lot of difference.
 - ◆ After all, "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth."
 - ◆ And in the end, "we all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities (or even our attempts to do good) like the wind, take us away."
 - ◆ ...and who can tell us any differently, for "God has hidden his face from us."
 - That's just the way it is.

- ✘ The other answer to this pain and loss in this world is to beg God...or perhaps even demand from God... that he *get off of his throne* and take a more active role in history
 - ✓ Isaiah:
 - 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...
 - ✓ Psalm 80:
 - Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim...
 - Stir up your strength and come to help us
 - Restore us, O Lord God of Hosts/
 - Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.
- ✘ It's a plea to God to break into our terrible times,
 - ✓ To make an intervention that would shake the foundations of the world
 - ✓ Because our only hope is in something that is beyond ourselves
 - That God is the only possibility that can crash through the impossibility of living in this world as it is.
- ✘ Jesus reminds us, in our reading from Mark, that God *will* intervene.
 - ✓ He says that at the end of time,
 - “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”
- ✘ And that's all well and good for the end times,
 - ✓ But what do we do in the meantime?
 - Do we resign ourselves to the evil around us and say, “that's just the way it is?”
- ✘ I don't think so.
 - ✓ And I come to that conclusion from a small phrase in the middle of Jesus' admonition for us to “stay awake.”
 - ✓ When Jesus says, “ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves his home and puts his slaves in charge, each doing his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.”
- ✘ I really have never thought of myself as a Slave of Jesus
 - ✓ I have heard of the song, “What a Friend I have in Jesus,”
 - But I don't recall a hymn that goes, “I'm just a Slave for Jesus, and he's always got another job for me.”
- ✘ So here on earth, as we await the great cosmic battle between Good and Evil, us slaves have been put in charge, not to give up and say, “that's just the way it is,”

- ✓ But rather, to join with God in doing the work that has been given us to do.
 - And we do that in the moral context of our Baptismal vows, and as representatives of our Master, who we expect to return—as Carol said—at any moment.
- ✗ And as God will push back the forces of evil once and for all at the end times, we here on earth are also taking our part in the fight.
 - ✓ And I see that going on right now, today, in Christ Episcopal Church
- ✗ Because when someone is hungry
 - ✓ Don & Joanne Blankenship are giving food to the Salvation Army food bank and
 - ✓ Guy Davidson and Diane Canington are organizing meals at Dinner at the Brick
- ✗ When somebody is naked
 - ✓ Someone else at the Red Door provides clothing and jackets and gloves.
- ✗ When someone is in prison,
 - ✓ June Cook is writing them and keeping them in mind
- ✗ When someone is sick,
 - ✓ Diane Ramerman and Diane Canington and Creamy Wilkins are giving healing care.
- ✗ When someone is homeless in the cold in Anacortes,
 - ✓ Churches have banded together to provide shelter
- ✗ When someone is the child of migrant workers
 - ✓ Carol Rodin and Shirley Barrett are teaching them at the Day Camp
- ✗ When someone is asking questions
 - ✓ Sandy Davidson or Dale Ramerman is opening a book and helping us to find answers.
- ✗ And under all this effort, we all depend upon each others prayers
 - ✓ Especially upon those whom in some churches are called “The Prayer Warriors”
 - Who hold the community together in their prayers and who serve to remind us that we are not doing this on our own, but that we slaves are surrounded with God’s blessing
- ✗ Because, when something bad happens, the easy answer is to say that
 - ✓ God is ignoring us, so we’ll just give up
 - ✓ Or say, “That’s the way it is.”
- ✗ For slaves, I think we’re doing a fairly good job
- ✗ It is both strange...and wonderful

- ✓ That as slaves of Jesus we can become the face of Jesus when we care for each other and pray for each, for both friends and strangers
 - It is also strange and wonderful that we can see the face of Jesus in those whom we care for.
- ✗ That is the miracle that shakes up the foundation of the world;
 - Things can and will change.
 - That is the miracle by which can rise above crying out in frustration and despair with things as they are
 - And keep awake and alert to the work that God has given us to do.