



Advent Reflection: Longing and Lament

- Isaiah 64.1-9
- Psalm 80.1-8, 18-19
- 1 Corinthians 1.3-9
- Mark 13.24-37

The season of Advent begins with a cry of desolation....

*All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

*No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins. Isaiah 64. 6-7*

*You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. Psalm 80:5*

In darkness and distress the prophet and psalmist pour out their laments of pain, pleading with God to come to those who feel bereft, abandoned, reviled and rejected, longing for God's saving power.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down. Isaiah 64.1

*Come and save us, Restore us, O God;
Make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:2-3*

Yet in this place of pain the writers look back, bringing to mind a time when God seemed more present.

*When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. Isaiah 64.3*

*You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it. Psalm 80.8*

Through looking back they find a source of hope to help them look forwards – the remembrance of God's actions for those who wait for Him. They are strengthened to watch and wait, understanding that they are being shaped in the process, even if it is a painful shaping.

*From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. Isaiah 64.4*

*You, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64.8*

Just as the people of Israel looked back to when God led them out of Egypt and forward to the coming of the Messiah, so in Advent, the church looks back to Christ's first coming and forward to his return in glory.

Mark describes this time in the gospel reading and urges his readers to watch and wait, living in the knowledge of Jesus' return.

*At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory....
But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the
Father.*

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come....

Keep watch...

What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!" Mark 13.26, 32-33.

What hope does Christ's return offer? Isaiah offers one profoundly hopeful vision.

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.*

*Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all face
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.*

It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Isaiah 25.6-9

Both as individuals and as a church we often feel in a place of lament and longing. There is so much pain and brokenness in our world, so much we long to change. But lament is not encouraged in our culture, least of all in the run up to Christmas - and longing, with its implicit waiting, is alien to society's habit of seeking immediate relief or gratification. Yet Advent offers us the gift of both – the opportunity to pour out our grief to God in lament and to focus our longing on the hope Christ offers. This Advent Sunday, perhaps we might receive this gift afresh.

**Jesus,
When darkness surrounds us
Hear our cry of distress.
Help us to trust that you hold us,
That you will come to us with saving power,
That your light will overcome the darkness.
Give us strength to watch and wait.
Amen.**

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