These ancient words were spoken around the year 537, before the birth of Christ. Israel had survived slavery, the wilderness, the battles and finally came to be a great nation, only to lose it all due to their unfaithfulness. Overtaken by the enemy, they lived in exile with the hope to one day return to the Promised Land. That day came, but they returned to Jerusalem to find the temple destroyed and many other hardships. In that context, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words.

‘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; 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.

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What a prayer! “Don’t throw us away. Don’t abandon us. Don’t leave us here to fend for ourselves. ‘O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...’” Who doesn’t pray that prayer at some point in their life? Who doesn’t wonder where God is at times?

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Several years back I had the rare privilege of being invited with a few other clergy of various faiths to have lunch with Elie Wiesel, human rights activist, author, professor and above all else, a Holocaust survivor. His book entitled, Night, is a must read. In 1944, at the age of 15, he was imprisoned in Auschwitz (Ow-switz) concentration camp. His mother and three sisters were murdered. He watched his father suffer and die. He survived, but not without great cost.

To have lunch with this man was one of the highlights my life. There was a sadness to him, a depth that only comes with suffering. He was soft spoken, honest and resolved. During the course of lunch, he said, “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.” How could this evil have happened in plain sight? How could people not care? Indifference.

He was asked how this horrific experience impacted his faith in God. He responded; “For a long time, I had no faith. Where was this God? How could a loving, all-powerful, all-knowing God allow this to happen? Either that God is not all-powerful, or that God does not care. Or, that God is not here. I had more questions than I had faith.” he said. “I still have questions.”

Those words are not spoken lightly. Forged out of pain and suffering, who wouldn’t ask, “Where is God?”

* 

I’ve heard that question, that cry, that plea over the 40 years of my ministry. Jack and Marilyn wanted to know where God was when their beautiful young daughter was senselessly killed in a school bus accident. People I sat with in counseling wanted to know where God was when they were being abused or assaulted. Where was God in their failed marriage, addictions, depression or anxiety?

Where is God when a perfectly healthy baby boy dies at childbirth due to a freak accident? Or where is God during any accident, at any age?

Where is God in the fires, the tornadoes, the earthquakes, the floods and other natural disasters? Some prayers seem to be answered while others are not. Some are saved while others perish. Is this random? Is it intentional? Is it based on who’s been naughty and who’s been nice? Tell me that’s not so.

Where is God in this war-torn world, where terrorist use God’s name as a license to kill? Is God doing anything in Washington, in Russia, in Afghanistan, or Syria?

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down…” Who doesn’t pray that prayer?

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There are times God seems absent, not always because of our sin. Sometimes it’s evil. Sometimes it’s the human condition. Sometimes it’s natural disasters. It would be
easy to lose heart. Day after day, prayer after prayer, hour after hour, we wait, we wait, we wait some more.

The psalmist writes,
_How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear this pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?_ (Psalms 13:1-2a)

How long? That’s how Advent talks. That’s how all of humanity talks when we become aware of our need of a Savior, our need of Divine intervention. “_O that you would tear open the heavens and come down…_”

*  

Isaiah was wise enough to know the problems of Israel were more than external, more than a destroyed temple and a devastated Jerusalem. They didn’t just need God to rebuild the temple and the city, they needed God to rebuild them as a people. There were internal problems.

_‘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.’_ (64:6)

And then Isaiah prays,
_‘Yet, O, Lord, you are our Father; …we are all your people._

(64:8a, 9b)

Dennis Olsen writes,

_That “yet” is the basis for Advent – a “yet” against all the present data, a “yet” based only in the person of God in whom we hope and to whom we belong._


God has no good reason to _tear open the heavens and come down_. We have not been faithful. We have not _loved the Lord our God with all our heart, …soul, …mind, and …strength._ (Mk 12:30) We have wandered off, worshipped lesser gods, or no god at all. We have taken pride in our own accomplishments, without gratitude to the One who empowers us to accomplish.
'We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.' (64:6)

And **YET!** And, YET…

*O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; (64:8a)*

And then there is this.

*Now consider, we are all your people. (64:9b)*

Do we really have to remind God of that? There are days when apparently, we do.

*Who hasn’t felt the absence of God? Advent is a time of hope. It’s beyond the scope of Christmas – beyond the first coming of Christ. Advent longs for a second coming.*

Isaiah stands over the rubble of the temple and prays for God’s presence and it comes. In time, it came in the Messiah. In time, Christ will come again!

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

*For you are our Father and we are all your people.*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Congregation: **Amen**