

Sermon 1618

Isaiah 64.1-8

December 3, 2017

Solitude is not a bad thing. A lot of thinking gets done. You think of the past. You think of the present. You look towards the future. So simple, yet it is getting as hard to find undisturbed time as it is finding a place dark enough to see the glories of the nighttime sky.

The shepherds outside Bethlehem had lots of time as they took turns watching their combined flocks at night. The great prophet Isaiah had time when activity after the sun went down meant burning expensive oil in lamps.

We know what Isaiah was thinking. His prophecy looks forward to the coming of the Savior and the eternity that Savior will bring.

A Silent Night for Sinful Hearts

1. Are the days of wonder past (1-5)?
2. Will the days of woe last (5-7)?
3. Father, hold us fast (8).

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!”

Since ancient times 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 (1, 4).”

There’s a bit of impatience in all of us, whether we are pushing the speed limit to get all the holiday errands done or watching the doors of the Advent calendar open in that countdown to the big day. Will Christmas ever get here?

Isaiah felt that impatience. He wanted the Lord to step in and act right now, right here. He didn’t doubt God’s power. He knew the Lord, he was God and the only God there was. Those the nations worshipped were deaf and dumb idols, mere wood and stone and metal. Isaiah had been raised on the history of his people, how the Lord parted the Red Sea for Moses and the Children of Israel, making the waters seethe in the wind. He remembered how Mount Sinai shook like a volcano when the Lord had come down to give them the Ten Commandments and how kings fell before them and the fame of what the Lord had done spread throughout the nations so they feared the very approach of God’s people.

It wasn’t like that now. Like a weathered hut in a harvested melon field, that’s what Jerusalem felt like now. Were the days of wonder past?

We know there is a God. We know the stories of the Bible, sort of. I tell you, from what I see and hear in Catechism class not a one of us know the stories well enough. We need to be in the Word a whole lot more. So put away the video games and the Facebook for a bit every day and pick up the Bible. Food for the soul which isn’t junk food. But the devil wants us to think that God has moved on. The days

of wonder are past. God used to act like that, but he doesn't now. He pretty much lets things go on without him, like God has gone missing.

That's a sin against the very first commandment. To believe and act like there is a God, but he isn't there for me. It is sin to so lower our expectations of what God can do for us that we no longer expect anything from him and, as a result, trust him for nothing.

A silent night for sinful hearts. Are the days of wonder over? Isaiah answers his own question. "You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways (5)."

A silent night for sinful hearts. Will the days of woe last?

The initial answer Isaiah finds isn't as satisfying as it should be because of all the trouble we cause ourselves.

"But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry.

How then can we be saved?

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 made us waste way because of our sins (5-7)."

Will the days of woe last? The Lord is good to those who are good to him. That's what Isaiah is saying. I don't think there's anybody in the world, believer or unbeliever, who would, if they were painted into a corner, disagree with that. You do good to those who do good to you. Befriend your friends and devil take your enemies.

If that is the path to happiness, however, they why are you so sad? Why are the lives of rockers so empty that they overdose? Why are the bedrooms of the powerful so boring that they harass members of the opposite sex in the workplace? Why is the respect accorded people so unsatisfying that they exaggerate their accomplishments? Trouble upon trouble will come to all who put their hope in a God who does good to those who do good to him.

But Isaiah doesn't only point the finger at them. He points the finger at us. Every one of us is like an oily rag dad cleaned his hands off after changing the oil in the car before he came into the house to wash up. Even our best deeds, our righteous acts, every one of them, are tainted with sin. Newly confirmed Susie uses her offering envelope to give the Lord \$2 from the \$50 she made that weekend and she smugly thinks she is giving more than her classmate, Freddy, who drops a dollar into the plate from the \$5 allowance he gets. We go the extra mile to do something

at church and then are a little miffed that we didn't get recognized for it. No, we didn't make a stink about it, but we just noticed and it made us feel a little less than happy. We diaper the baby, our first one, the second time in 20 minutes and start thinking maybe one is enough.

When we take the time to think about it, a religious solution isn't the answer. The Lord is good to those who do good. We are still sinful and sin brings woe. Will the days of woe last?

A silent night for sinful hearts. Father, hold us fast.

“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father,
we are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand (8).”

A silent night. No distractions. No interruptions. Just you and your thoughts. And they keep circling, keeping coming back to the only answer that will satisfy, the only answer that will quiet sinful hearts. Father, hold us fast. Our Lord does not treat us as we deserve. He shows his love in spite of us. He offers his forgiveness even when we don't want it. He exercises his patience when we have long lost ours.

We are his children, the work of his hand. As the potter marks his vases and jars to show his craftsmanship, God has claimed us. He created us, knitting us together in our mothers' wombs. He recreated us when he brought us to faith and sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts. He took us in his hand and will not let go.

Are the days of wonder past? No. Every day Jesus sends forth his Spirit people are converted and faith is sustained and strengthened to the end. Will the days of woe last? No, because every day Jesus showers us with the forgiveness he came into this world to win. No sin is stronger than our God. We can't outrun his forgiveness. We cannot hide from his mercy. Father hold us fast. He does, in the firmest way possible. Our God embraces us by becoming one of us. How much more can you identify with those you want to help? The answer Isaiah looked forward to is the answer we are getting ready for. Christmas. A day of wonder. A day that banishes woe. A day that convinces us God will always hold us fast.

A Silent Night for Sinful Hearts

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I know this is going to be a busy month. I know our darker angels will have a fertile field to bring forth a harvest of bitterness, selfishness, feelings of abandonment and isolation. But take the time to be still and think. The baby Jesus is the answer to our sin. Make the time to be quiet and listen. The Lord still works wonders in our hearts and lives through his Word and the faith which grasps the hand which holds us fast.