

**While We Are Waiting**  
**Don Lincoln**  
**Isaiah 64: 1-9**

I didn't grow up with much Advent. I think we had Advent candles in church – but I don't really remember them – I don't even remember where the Advent wreath was located. I'm sure we sang some Advent hymns – *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* and *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* – because they've been familiar to me for a long time.

But generally I remember Christmas Carols. It's no wonder. I grew up with the maroon Presbyterian Hymnal that had only eight Advent hymns, three of which I've never heard. EVER. With 4 Sundays in Advent, and only 5 advent hymns we used – and we were a three-hymn per service minimum congregation – that meant we definitely got into the Christmas tunes.

Which makes sense, because after the 8 Advent hymns came 24 Christmas Carols. Three times as many! And of course, that didn't include Jingle Bells, White Christmas, or Grandma Got Run Over by A Reindeer.

Which fits the way it goes; the leap from Thanksgiving turkeys to Christmas cookies, right past Advent. The consumer feeding frenzy kicks in on Black Friday with lights, decorations and happy songs – and only an occasional grumpy word about whether it's Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays. I guess the ratio of Christmas tunes to Advent tunes on the radio is about 100 to 1.

But church – we're different!! Which is why we read these Advent texts and sing these Advent hymns. Because Advent – for believers – doesn't allow us to leap so quickly. And as believers – or even as skeptics who long to believe – that's a **really good thing**. Advent invites you and me to be real. To be honest. To be straight forward with our world, our lives, our predicament.

“O that You would tear open the heavens and come down and make Your name known O God. Do not be exceedingly angry; do not remember iniquity forever; consider – we are all your people.”

With Isaiah's prodding you and I enter the first Sunday of the Christian Year in lamentation. We enter eschewing all forms of denial, or polite piety or cheap cheer. You and I are invited to allow the radical honesty of Scripture to make **US** honest too. You and I have a privilege in this season that most people don't get. We get to stop posturing. We're allowed to stop pretending. We're allowed to get real.<sup>1</sup>

"Our world is not okay," this Advent reading reminds in stark terms. We are surrounded by evil and suffering, and many of us are not sure our faith can endure what our eyes witness every day. Our 9 week series on "Be the Church" – and its discussion of racism, violence, poverty and all the rest – is still echoing in my mind as I enter this season. I long for a Savior to rend the heavens and come down. And some days the very ferocity of that longing wearies my soul. Sometimes hope itself is a long grind.<sup>2</sup>

Which is why the first gift of Advent – for all of us – is the permission to tell the truth. You and I are invited to describe life "**on earth as it is**," and not as some mistakenly assume our religion – or our culture with all its pretty wrappings – requires us to render it in this season. The prophet does not speak in superficial ways to try to dispel the darkness of desolation. Neither should we.

As my friend Quinn Caldwell says, "The Bible makes clear the context for Christmas isn't rejoicing, it's desolation. It's not fullness; it's need. It's not presence; it's absence. I mean, if things weren't pretty messed up for everybody, why would God have bothered?"<sup>3</sup>

While the situation to which Isaiah is writing is not ours – it is remarkably similar at its core. Like Israel, our reliance on power, prestige, and hoarded resources has rendered inequities and injustices that have our world in a death grip. We have met the enemy – and it is us. It's always us. That's biblical.

And Isaiah gives us the classic biblical answer to how the people of God can be opened to the reentry of God's renewing and transforming ways that will heal the world. Confession and repentance. Confession, which clears the way for the people to cast themselves upon God's mercy. Confession washes them clean of the prideful thought<sup>4</sup> – the idiotic thought – that they can save themselves.

Advent isn't about our best world. It's about our worst world. Which you and I have the privilege of confessing today.

So that the One who promised to come – who came not in earthquake and fire – but in the humble and humiliating power of a baby – might come in us again. The One whose very self-emptying on a cross gave us the ONE gift that might transform the despair and desolation of this world.

A gift that proclaims if you and I live in that grace – live like this Jesus – expending our life for the sake of others – even at the risk of losing it – the world can indeed be changed. One life at a time. My life. Your life. Evil cannot overcome THAT kind of living, THAT kind of loving when it is unleashed upon the world with all the fury that comes in a manger. Friends, that Light CAN shine in the darkness.

Thanks be to God we can be honest and tell the truth about our world because the sooner we do, the sooner we are ready for Him to come. May He come, in each of our lives this Advent.

May it be so. AMEN.

1. Debie Thomas, [www.JourneyWithJesus.net](http://www.JourneyWithJesus.net), November 30, 2014.
2. *ibid.*
3. Quinn Caldwell, Still Speaking online devotional, December 2017.
4. Paul D. Hanson, Interpretation Commentary on Isaiah 40-66.