

Focus on Isaiah 64:1–9

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” William P. Brown

These final verses establish the ties that bind God to God’s people. God is “our Father,” equated earlier with “our Redeemer from of old” (63:16). To claim God as paternal is to assert God’s familial claim upon Israel and Israel’s claim upon God, a kinship that necessitates continued recognition and care for Israel. The community is also God’s handiwork, pottery, no less, shaped by loving hands (cf. Jer. 18). God would not let a people slide into destruction any more than a father would sacrifice his son or a potter would destroy her prized bowl. The bottom line is that “we are all your people,” whether God likes it or not, for the covenantal bond is indissoluble. God, thus, is bound to act.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Scott Bader-Saye

Isaiah calls on Israel to be malleable in the hands of God, and he reminds God to fulfill the task of forming Israel into a people of blessing. In the season of Advent, Christians imaginatively enter a time of waiting for the Christ child, who comes as God hidden in human form, who comes not to inaugurate an apocalyptic cleansing but to reveal the power of the powerless in his self-giving on the cross. In so doing, he reveals the will of the Father who is eternally, patiently molding and shaping the clay of creation into the New Jerusalem.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,”
Patricia E. De Jong

At Advent, God’s people summon the courage and the spiritual strength to remember that the holy breaks into the daily. In tiny ways, we can open our broken hearts to the healing grace of God, who opens the way to peace. May that peace come upon us as a healing balm, as a mighty winter river, gushing and rushing through the valleys of our prideful fear and our own self-righteous indignation. As a friend has said, this is not a season for passive waiting and watching. It is a season of wailing and weeping, of opening up our lives and our souls with active anticipation and renewed hope.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”
Donald Booz

Yet recognizing God’s presence may be a daily task, especially given the world in which we live. Like Isaiah, we need to remember when God has been visible in our midst. Waiting with hope that God will be visible once again is the call of Isaiah to God. Watching with eyes to see is the call of Isaiah to the people of faith. To hear the voice of Isaiah is to proclaim that Advent is more than a time to hear promises about God. Advent becomes a season of attentiveness to the presence of God already among us.

Signposts on the Way to Advent's Hopes



It (Isaiah 64:1–9) is a strange way to begin this time of Advent. Beginning Advent with weeping and a lament? That is unusual! And powerful. This is where we need to begin. The coming of Advent jolts the church out of Ordinary Time with the invasive news that it's time to think about fresh possibilities for deliverance and human wholeness. . . . Hope is what is left when your worst fears have been realized and you are no longer optimistic about the future. Hope is what comes with a broken heart willing to be mended. . . . We pray for the hope of Advent: that God will break into the ordinary, bringing the promise of peace, hope, and restored life.

—Patricia deJong, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 4

God's refusal to replicate a Red Sea-type deliverance does not mean that God has abandoned Israel or the church. Our hope does not rely on God's acting today in the same ways God acted in the ancient stories, but it does rely on God's being the same God yesterday, today, and tomorrow—a God who hears our cries, a God who does not abandon us, a God who will finally redeem all that is lost in a new heaven and new earth (Isaiah 65:17). The tradition of biblical lament does not invoke the past as nostalgia, nor does it dismiss the present in despair; rather, it draws on the collective memories of God's people as a source of hope for the future.

—Scott Bader-Saye, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 6

Too much that passes for hope among us is little more than wishful thinking disconnected from action taken in response. Too much that passes for hope is self-centered daydreaming about what would be nice for me and mine to the exclusion of any concrete consideration for you and yours. Too much that passes for hope wants to let go and let God, even in those matters where our gracious God waits and waits on us to act. To term such hope wishy-washy is a gentle understatement. Such a parody of hope leaves us spiritually homeless, stripped of the calling and direction so vital in Biblical faith. . . . Hope involves finding where and to whom we and all creation belong and then having the trust and courage to start living in that direction.

—John Indermark, *Hope: Our Longing for Home*, (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2007), 11–12