

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *When the Stars Begin to Fall*

### Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 64:1-9 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
<sup>2</sup> 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!  
<sup>3</sup> When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
<sup>4</sup> 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.  
<sup>5</sup> 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.  
<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> 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.  
<sup>8</sup> Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
<sup>9</sup> Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,  
and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

### Gospel Lesson

Mark 13:24-37 (NRSV)

<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

## Bible/Sermon Focus

In our reading this week from the book of the prophet Isaiah, we hear the words of a communal lament. A lament is just an outpouring of sadness and anger, an outpouring of difficult feelings. At the time when Isaiah was written, Israel, the Hebrew people, was in a unique relationship with God compared to the other nations around them. They believed their God to be big enough to handle all of their human feelings. Hence, a tradition of lamenting, of pouring out our sufferings and our feelings to God, was created.

God and God's people have a unique relationship. Isaiah asks, "After all we've been through, do you even care?" In the same breath Isaiah says, "God, you are in charge and you are good." We can hear the depth and breadth of emotion that Isaiah and God's people bring to their Lord. And (beginning in chapter 65) God's response to this lament is a promise that God has always been there and that it is us, the people, who turn away. We turn away from God; we turn away from each other; we turn away from our God's purpose.

And then God reminds Isaiah that God is doing a new thing, and we hear about the peaceable kingdom, which God has given us, but is not here yet. It's described as in process, introduced but not completed—liminal.

Liminality is something we will be talking about a lot during this season of Advent. A season at the threshold, a season of waiting, a season of in-between. Advent is a liminal time.

"Advent is a season of waiting in the liminal space of anticipation and wonder. Emmanuel is not yet here, and we long for his arrival. We are on the verge, at the threshold. The arrival of Christ will transform the cosmos into its true reality (us included), and so we watch for it, alert and awake."

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Advent mean to you? What are your hopes for this Advent season? Do you have any spiritual practices or traditions that you are participating in?
2. Do you lament to God? What is that experience like?
3. Mediate on this quote from the sermon and share your thoughts and feelings: "The arrival of Christ will transform the cosmos into its true reality (us included)."
4. Define liminal/liminality in your own words.

## Prayer

Oh God, we wait. We wait for your birth. We wait for the rebirth of all things. We wait for the ancient, new thing that you have promised and that you provide. We stand together, as a community, at the threshold. Help us be present with you, this Advent season. Quiet our lives and minds to be in the midst, in the middle, in the liminal with your Spirit's work, in her bringing forth the messiah, our Emmanuel, your son, Amen.

*So now we are in this "waiting for it" phase, but we are waiting for it with eyes wide open, awake to what God is doing, awake to the "in between" place we live, on the threshold between what God wants and what is.*