

One of the most popular television game shows is The Price Is Right hosted by long-time emcee Bob Barker. When you receive tickets to attend this highly-watched, fast-moving game show, you become automatically eligible to have your name drawn to become a participant. As the show opens, names are drawn, and an announcer exclaims, "Mary Jones, come on down!" Mary excitedly jumps from her seat and runs down to the front of the game show set to compete with other contestants for an opportunity to go on the platform to guess the price of various show cases. If Mary is lucky, she will beat out the other competitors by coming the closest to the price of a certain item or items. When this happens, she runs onto the platform to compete for various prizes and show cases. Competing on The Price Is Right all begins when the announcer calls a contestant's name and asks her to "Come on down!"

Isaiah in chapter 64:1-9 gives us a picture on this first Sunday of Advent of his desire for God to reveal himself once again to his people. For Isaiah, God must appear. The great Advent hymn reveals this desire of Isaiah and of people of all times for God to come down. The hymn echoes the heart cry of humankind:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appears.*

This is Isaiah's desire, but it is also our desire: that God, during this Advent Season, would reveal himself to us in a whole NEW WAY. **HOW DOES HE DO THAT??**

**He Petitions God.** The prophet addresses a people who are powerless and oppressed. His address is in the form of a prayer which for us contains the hope of Advent. **There are two distinct elements in this prayer,** and they are a "CRY OF DESPERATION" and a "CONFIDENCE IN GOD" who can intervene in the human situation.

**Isaiah wants God to "come down."** There is the suggestion that God is removed from the earth. **In order for God to become actively involved in the affairs of humankind, he will, of necessity, have to rip open heaven so that he can become involved in the affairs of earth.** This petition of the prophet is a reminder that Advent is the cry for God to reveal himself. **Elie Wiesel tells of an ancient story** that has meaning for our time and helps us understand the prophet's cry.

A man is on a boat. He is not alone, but acts as if he were. One night -- without warning -- he suddenly begins to cut a hole under his seat. The other people on the boat shout and shriek at him: "What on earth are you doing? Have you gone mad? Do you want to sink us all? Are you trying to destroy us?" Calmly the man answers: "I don't understand what you want. What I'm doing is none of your business. I paid my way. I'm not cutting under your seat. Leave me alone!" What the fanatic/egotist will not accept, but what you and I cannot forget, is that all of us are in the same boat.

Wiesel was right; we are all in the same boat. **Advent is our cry for God to come and do something before we sink.** Isaiah in his petition reminds God of how he came and helped in the past. He wants God to intrude once again in the life of the people. Is not the purpose of Advent to take us back to the beginning in the person of Jesus Christ and to remind us that Jesus Christ will come to consummate all history under his reign of love?

**When we look at the pain and suffering of our dark world,** the prophet's cry becomes our cry, for we want God to "come down" and right wrong and reveal his glory and majesty by his presence. The prophet petitions God to "come down," but in order to attract God's attention, something must be done besides shouting. **SO WHAT DOES ISIAAH DO? He then proceeds to say ... "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." Yes, he confesses to God for all the nation. He confesses for everyone.**

**Confess the Nation's Guilt** the tone suddenly changes. As the prophet surveys the situation, he lowers his voice and confesses the guilt of the nation, for Israel HAS "SINNED AND IS UNCLEANED." What does the prophet do? **HE LEADS THE ENTIRE NATION IN A CONFESSION OF SIN. \*Is that where we are at right now? In need of confession? Confession of our sins. Is that why we are facing covid-19? Maybe it is time for us to become a nation that is knitted together instead of a nation that is solo focus. This whole "Mask" situation has shown that many are self-focused instead of Nation focused. Like Israel, it is time to confession our sins to God.**

**So often the church has viewed the Lenten season as the time of confession, repentance, and penitence.** Is it possible that for the church really to experience Advent, there must be genuine confession and repentance? For all of us truly to prepare for the coming of Christ, there must always be confession and repentance. **Confession is a clearing house for the church to seek the mercy of God.** True confession washes away the arrogance of thinking that we can save ourselves.

W. E. Sangster, in his book *The Pure in Heart*, relates the story of an evangelistic preaching mission held in York near the end of the nineteenth century. One night at the conclusion of the sermon several people responded to the invitation. In the group that came forward was an elderly man. The speaker counseled with each one who had come forward, including this elderly man who quietly and meekly answered the questions he was asked. Later the evangelist learned that the elderly gentleman was David Hill, a saintly and distinguished Methodist missionary to China who happened to be home on furlough. Hill was soon to return to China, a country he dearly loved where he would die of typhus. The evangelist sought David Hill out and made a stumbling apology for having treated him as a beginner in the Christian faith. David Hill responded very simply, "I thought it would do me good to kneel among the repentant." **Advent comes each year to judge us and remind us that we are all sinners.** Advent also answers the question, **"How can we be saved?"** The prophet reminds Israel and us that our own efforts to save ourselves leave us like a filthy rag, contaminated and impure, so awful that one dare not touch it. In our own strength we are like a fall leaf, faded and vulnerable, that will be blown away. **Remember the prophet's words...**

***How can we be saved?*** It is only through true confession and repentance, which are echoed in the Words...**"Lord have mercy upon us."**

**From "PETITION" and "CONFESSION" the prophet moves to ONE MORE ISSUE...**

**A PLEA TO GOD!!** Suddenly, **the emphasis of the prophet shifts from the past to the present.** This is a present tense moment, and God for the first time is mentioned by name. Using powerful indicatives, **God is reminded that:**

**You are our Father; you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.**

It is almost as if the prophet has become a defense attorney making the final argument before a jury. As he proceeds with his argument, he acknowledges that God is the all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving one. In an emotional appeal, he begs God to look and see what has become of his people, the Holy City, and the Temple. His argument reaches its climax with the expression, **"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father!"** In other words, what God has started to fashion with his hands should be completed. It is a plea for God to break into their isolation and to destroy sin's gridlock. This plea is also the plea of Advent that God would come. **Advent means coming, and in the person of Jesus the true Advent will come.**

When the Exxon Valdez spilled thousands of gallons of crude oil along the beautiful Alaskan shoreline, accusations and finger pointing began immediately. In the midst of the fray, a suggestion was made that Exxon's president make a trip to see firsthand the horrible damage to the environment. His response was to imply that such a trip would be a waste of time. He could have gone, but chose not to. **The response of people everywhere to this disaster might have been different had the president of Exxon visited Alaska and gotten down in the muck, and cleaned and freed a few GEESE.**

**A Chinese Confucius scholar who was converted to Christ told this story:**

A man fell into a dark, dirty, slimy pit. He tried to climb out of the pit, but he couldn't. **Confucius came along.** He saw the man in the pit and he said, "Poor fellow, if he'd listened to me, he never would have gotten there," and went on. **Buddha came along.** When he saw the man in the pit, he said, "Poor fellow, if he'll come up here, I'll help him," and he too went on. **Then Jesus Christ came** and he said, "Poor fellow!" and jumped into the pit and lifted him out.

**Our plea at Advent is that God would come alongside us. The message from God is...HE HAS COME AND WE ARE HIS PEOPLE.** We respond, "How do we know you have come?" He answers, "Look at Jesus beside you in the muck of your world... **KNOW THAT THROUGH HIM, I HAVE "COME DOWN" TO BE WITH YOU. Amen.**