

Scripture Lesson for Nov. 29, 2020 – Advent 1

Introduction to the Hebrew Lesson: Isaiah 64:1-9

In the third section of Isaiah, considered to be a “third version of the prophet,” we hear the prophet’s response to the question: “Can We Be Saved?” In response, Isaiah says, in verse 12 this profound thing: “Still, GOD, you are our Father. We’re the clay and you’re our potter: All of us are what you made us. Don’t be too angry with us, O GOD. Listen to the rest of the prophesy of Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:1-9 Can We Be Saved?

64 ¹⁻⁷ Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend,
make the mountains shudder at your presence—
As when a forest catches fire,
as when fire makes a pot to boil—
To shock your enemies into facing you,
make the nations shake in their boots!
You did terrible things we never expected,
descended and made the mountains shudder at your presence.
Since before time began
no one has ever imagined,
No ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who happily do what is right,
who keep a good memory of the way you work.
But how angry you’ve been with us!
We’ve sinned and kept at it so long!
Is there any hope for us? Can we be saved?
We’re all sin-infected, sin-contaminated.
Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.
We dry up like autumn leaves—
sin-dried, we’re blown off by the wind.
No one prays to you
or makes the effort to reach out to you
Because you’ve turned away from us,
left us to stew in our sins.

8-12 Still, GOD, you are our Father.
We're the clay and you're our potter:
All of us are what you made us.
Don't be too angry with us, O GOD.
Don't keep a permanent account of wrongdoing.
Keep in mind, please, we *are* your people—all of us.
Your holy cities are all ghost towns:
Zion's a ghost town,
Jerusalem's a field of weeds.
Our holy and beautiful Temple,
which our ancestors filled with your praises,
Was burned down by fire,
all our lovely parks and gardens in ruins.
In the face of all this,
are you going to sit there unmoved, GOD?
Aren't you going to say something?
Haven't you made us miserable long enough?

Introduction: The Gospel Lesson Mark 13:24-37

In the translation of this text in Mark 13 in "The Message," Jesus tells of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem; this is a horrific thing to imagine. It would be easy to suggest this bad news story about the temple will devastate the people. But then in chapter 13, verses 24-37, Jesus proclaims his coming in ways that will give the people hope for the future. Jesus uses the two images of a fig tree and the need to keep alert to what is to come...Listen to a reading from Mark's gospel:

Gospel Lesson: Mark 13:24-37 (The Message)

24-25 "Following those hard times, Sun will fade out, moon cloud over,
Stars fall out of the sky, cosmic powers tremble.

26-27 "And then they'll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling
the sky—no one will miss it! He'll dispatch the angels; they will pull in the
chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole.

²⁸⁻³¹ “Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer’s just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door. Don’t take this lightly. I’m not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won’t wear out.

³²⁻³⁷ “But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven’s angels, not even the Son. Only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don’t know the timetable. It’s like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So, stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don’t want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I’m saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch.”