

Isaiah 64 O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— 2as 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! 3When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 4From 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. 5You 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.

6We 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. 7There 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. 8Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Mark 13

33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34It 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. 35Therefore, 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, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Darkness.

More and more darkness.

Babies that are born with AIDS - conceived in the midst of disease.

Babies who were drunk and drugged in their mother's wombs - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Crack babies.

The light is failing, the darkness growing.

Children in gangs - sixth and seventh and eighth graders hurting and harming - marking the walls of their neighborhoods - marking their own spirits with sex and violence.

The darkness is growing.

Children having children - more and more children born to single mothers. More and more adultery bringing more and more divorces. Responsibilities that are a great challenge for two, now the burden of one.

Where will it all lead?

We pray with the prophet, "You, O Lord are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes of your heritage. O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

"We do not fear you," this could be our prayer. Who in our land fears God? We fear the loss of the rainforests, we fear the holes in the ozone layer, we fear that the poor may rise up against us, we fear our children or ourselves not having jobs, but who fears God? "O Lord that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

I can't imagine anything less than that helping us now. "Lord, tear open the heavens and come down. Lord we can't fix the mess we've made. We can't even dream solutions for our problems. O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

And how does God answer our prayer? With Jesus.

When Jesus came up out of the water at his baptism, Mark tells us that the heavens were torn open and the spirit of God descended as a dove upon Jesus. God tore open the heavens and came down. And most everyone missed it.

O, they didn't miss the healing. They gathered around Jesus' house with every ache and pain, calling, pleading, begging. He listens and touches, the blind see, the lame walk the deaf hear.

And no one missed the food - thousands gathered on the hillside and feasting abundantly. For free food they'd come back every day and so would we with our pleading for bread.

And we'd never miss the shows of power. The walking on water, and stilling storms and turning water into wine. Even if we don't have ears to hear what Jesus is teaching us about faith that God will not forget us. Still the healing and the food and the miracles will pack us in. But when all of the healing and the feeding and the miracles were over this is what Jesus said:

"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 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. 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, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

The same Jesus spoke these words, warning all to be alert in the evening, and at midnight, and at cockcrow and at dawn. And here's what happened:

At evening he was gathered with his disciples at supper, took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, given for you." And took the cup, blessed it and gave it to them all saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. "

At midnight while disciples slept he prayed even as the betrayer was at hand.

At cockcrow he looked at Peter who had just denied him three times.

At dawn they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

But the watching is not over.

At 9 am they crucified him.

At noon darkness came over all the land.

At three o'clock he died.

At evening his body was laid in the tomb.

Watch, Keep alert.

So it was that God has answered the prayer of God's people, tore open the heavens and came down. He was born the child of a mother not married. He died the victim of a murderous crowd and an indifferent state.

In every way he is not what we thought he would be. God is not what we thought God would be - for we expected the crushing of evil, and the triumph of good. We expected a show and a parade that the entire world would stop to see. We expected blazing light and the end of all darkness. Instead Jesus died on the cross.

"Watch!" says Jesus. This is how God tears the heavens and comes down. He lives our life, he dies our death. No healing saves him from death, no miraculous food on the cross - most of all no miracle.

Still watch. When there is no food, no healing no miracle, still watch. Hold those babies with AIDS and watch. Help the ones afflicted with fetal alcohol syndrome and the babies born addicted to crack and watch. Don't turn your back on the kids imprisoned in gangs, the mother's without husbands, children shuffled from parent to parent. Be there for them and watch.

Watch until another dawn when the tomb will be empty and the sun will never set. For that dawn is surely coming for babies born with AIDS, or abused before they breathe. That dawn is surely coming for you and for me. That dawn is surely coming through Jesus.

Keep awake.