

Isaiah 64:1-9 It's broken!
Nov. 27, 2011

Children sermon:

Show the kids a box of Playmobile figures and tell the story of a boy who was given for Christmas a box of Playmobile figures a lot like this one. He had put it on his Christmas list because he liked to think of himself as an arctic explorer. Show the cover of the box showing the set all put together. Then, open the box and inside are all of the pieces. "Oh no! It's broken!" said the boy. Explain that sometimes we want God to fix everything, magically, i.e. to do it for us. Maybe we want God to make a girl at school to like us. However, God likes to work with and through us, because we get to know him better as we help God in this world.

Black Friday may be over but most of us are far from being "prepared" for Christmas. Closets, crawl spaces and top shelves may be filled with bags and boxes for under the tree but there is still all of that wrapping and bow tying and in some cases the dreaded assembling as in "some assembly required."

I remember when I was a young mother, preparing for one of our first Christmases with children, having a conversation with other parents about the common experience of staying up late on Christmas eve with parts laid out before us and a tool box by our side.

It was one of those "can you top this kind" of conversations.

- ❑ The dad who carefully set up a train to run around the tree, only to discover batteries were not included.
- ❑ Another parent had most of some kind of scooter put together, only to discover a part missing. (later found under a chair)
- ❑ All of us agreed that if we had read the directions, it probably wouldn't have helped that late at night.

It was in that conversation that I heard some interesting advice from an older parent, who had long ago given up any attempt at assembling anything before Christmas.

Instead, she and her husband would just wrap up the box of parts and put that under the tree.

Christmas day, in their family, was a time to work together to build the toys. Their kids had come to expect and enjoy the special time spent with parents.

Not all of us are that patient but I understand the added value of parent and child working together.

This same family gave their son an old, beat up bicycle for his birthday. I remember that when I first heard that, I was really puzzled because they could afford a new one and it seemed a bit stingy to me.

However, in the end, the bike was only part of the gift.

Over a whole summer, the dad and son worked together in the garage, taking the bike apart, cleaning all of the parts, sanding off the rust, choosing a new color, painting its frame, adding a new seat, handle bar ribbons, and basket.

The real gift was time with each other, and the life lessons of waiting and recycling, and of course finding joy in the process.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah.

Vicar Ed and I are going to do a 3 week series on the Isaiah Advent texts. To help you along, I've made up a little background sheet for you to take home.

What you need to know is that actually a number of prophets and writers contributed to the book of Isaiah.

It was written over hundreds of years and describes a beat up, Israel and their relationship with their Father God.

There are three parts to this epoch story.

First Isaiah: Long after the Hebrews were given the Promised Land, they began to take the land and their God for granted.

They no longer want to work with him in building a fair and just society.

And they began to ignore him!

By the time we get to the first part of Isaiah's story, the Promised land has been divided into two kingdoms and the Northern Kingdom has already been or is about to be conquered by foreign invaders and the Southern Kingdom is in danger of the same thing.

The prophet is warning them and calling them back to the God of their fathers who they have been neglecting, before it is too late.

The theological issue is that the people of God were trusting in other nation's gods and in their own political solutions, rather than trusting God's promises, to "fix" what was broken in their world.

Second Isaiah: The second part of Isaiah tells the story of God's people in exile from their beloved Jerusalem.

They are suffering the consequences of their sin.

Isaiah is calling the people back into a strong relationship with God and looks forward to their return to Jerusalem.

Third Isaiah: Today's text is from the third part of the book of Isaiah and it is addressed to God's people who have finally returned from exile, to Jerusalem.

They have restored their relationship with God but there is still great disappointment because from all outward appearances...Jerusalem is still broken. It's a little like the box of Lego parts or the beat up bike: What they need is there but what they have is not what they expected.

There is so much work to be done to rebuild Jerusalem...and to rebuild their relationship with God.

They need help from their Father!

And so the prophet calls out

“Rip open the heavens and Come. Come O Lord. Don't forget we are your children. Come and Help us rebuild this mess. You are our Father! Come on Dad, together we can make something out of this mess.” **Very loose translation of course. But what I want you to hear is that we are just like these people in Isaiah.**

1. Today is the first Sunday in Advent and we are preparing to celebrate the time when God did rip open the heavens and come down in the gift of his son, Jesus, born in a humble manger.
2. We also can use these weeks before Christmas, in the midst of all the holiday chaos, to, at least in our times together in worship and in our prayers and with a few advent traditions, to prepare our own hearts for Christ's coming to us in our lives now.
Christ comes daily in all sorts of acts big and small but most certainly in word and sacrament and in the gifts of his grace—forgiveness and comfort.
3. And if we listen to the texts we read in worship and the hymns we sing and the creeds we say, we also know that we are preparing for Christ's final coming to judge the living and the dead.

Talk of the final judgment may give us reason to fear or despair; truthfully our lives and our world are always a mess, even in the best of times. But of course the one who will one day come to judge is also one we already know.

Our Father in Heaven loves his children so much that he wants to spend time with us and wants to build a better relationship with us.

On this Thanksgiving weekend we are certainly aware of our blessings. However, giving thanks for our blessings is also a recognition that these blessings come to us as gift and that on our own, left to our own devices, we don't do very well.

And so we are invited to offer up our bits and pieces, our beat up old lives. Offer them up to God and together, with God, we will work to rebuild and restore what is broken, until that day when all things will be made new.

And the amazing promise here is that in the process, of our trusting and relying on God, we will be strengthening our relationship with him.

This is the good news of Advent; this is the good news of the Gospel