

Isaiah 64:1-9 and Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

The title for this homily that didn't make it into the bulletin is: How Long? Not *how long* is this sermon, but how long must we wait for God...?

Did your mother or father ever tell you that you could not have your dessert until you ate your spinach? Well, our religious forbearers had a similar idea because they will not let us fully rejoice around religious holidays... until we have tasted some bitterness.

So we start out this time of Advent by first looking at our world and ourselves... and our scriptures make us take a hard look! But think about it, how much more brilliant the star will be that ushers this Christ into our world, when we recognize the darkness into which this spirit of light and love... enters.

When we lived in Michigan and took our daughter to a UCC church there, they had a prayer of confession in the bulletin *every* week...not just on Communion Sunday as we do here. When we read the words, "forgive us for this or that, selfishness, or greed, or lack of humility..." Anna would sometimes not say the words if she thought they did not apply to her. At least she was paying attention!

But a little self-reflection and acknowledgment of the world around us and our own complicity in it...is a good thing....and more meaningful than blindly jumping into a Holiday Frenzy.

Let us be in prayer: Forgiving God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our Sunday School material calls these texts, a "two-sided coin." We long to be hopeful, expectant....planning already for the love, the joy and the peace...and yet, there is this other side. We know of injustices, iniquities aplenty that fill our news and our times....don't we though!??

Oh God...do not hide your face from this world! Open our own hearts and those who would rather be wealthy than share in the goodness for all our nation and world. Open our own hearts and those who would falsely claim atrocities done by people of different faiths or races. Open our own hearts and those who would kneel before companies who exploit our earth as well as the least of these who do not have a

voice...all in the name of getting more wealthy. Forgive our nation, O Gracious God, for framing foreign policy around the sale of military weapons...forgive us and do not hide your face from us!

Our color for Advent is purple, some use blue...it is the same color that we use during Lent. It is a color of remorse. James Brenneman writes in *The Christian Century* that "the color of remorse...warns us not to greet God too soon... until we acknowledge that we are clay in the divine potter's hands, people chastened by God's silence, ready to be molded *anew* as the 'work of God's hand.'"

We have to be ready...to be molded anew! What an image! Have you ever made a pot from clay? Some use wheels that spin a big lump of clay allowing centrifugal force to pull the sloppy clay outwards, while the hands hold it in and give it particular shape.

Or maybe you remember making coil pots with clay...rolling out each long snake-like coils, then carefully wrapping them around and around, smoothing out the grooves with a little water on your clay-covered fingers?

How might God be shaping us...shaping us as vessels that hold God's spirit? What other forces are trying to pull us this way and that to make us into something else? We try to be in complete control...and yet, we might "let" this Potter shape us...make us more humble, more loving, more courageous to act in ways that are good for all...our people and our environment...

O God...how long before you come to us? Do not hide from us but let us be supple in your shaping hands that we might be part of a creative wholeness for this world!

We certainly cannot do this by ourselves...we call on a Larger Love to fill our very beings...as individuals *and* as a community of faith...we need to work together...

Patricia De Jong writes these words: "At Advent, God's people summon the courage and the spiritual strength to remember that the holy breaks into the daily" *...all the time.*

Do we have the courage....are we brave enough to allow for the possibility of Holiness breaking into our daily-ness? Wouldn't this be a wonderful Advent thing to do...making each daily task, a sacrament...a holy act? Is this the way that God "breaks in" to our world?

Perhaps this Advent, we might look for hopeful and inspiring acts when we read the paper and listen to the news; the many people donating to Warm the Children, filling

our food pantries to help others, planting trees, knitting hats and mittens, being involved in good causes...I won't say who, but a family in our congregation has decided to forego useless gifts this year and is donating money for a family in need. They did this last year, too and they said it was the most meaningful Christmas they have ever had.

So let us watch for the Sacred breaking into our everyday lives...and work *with* it...allowing it to shape *us*, as a potter with a piece of clay....to be vessels for God's infinite love.

Oh God...it is enough to let us begin this Advent...with a cautious *hope!*

Amen.