

*All I Want for Christmas*

First Congregational Church Branford

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

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The prophet Isaiah calls out to God:

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

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

In our Gospel reading Jesus privately talks with disciples Peter, James, John, and Andrew about the end of the world:

24 ‘But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 ‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he\* is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly I tell you,

this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>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, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

The word of God for the people of God.

Okay, have you prepared for this since the Welcome?? Let's go ahead now and name aloud a couple things we want globally or nationally - *and* after each one let's respond, we light a candle of hope...

All I want for Christmas globally or nationally is....  
we light a candle of hope...

All I want for Christmas at First Congregational is... I know - a settled minister! .... we light a candle of hope...

Anything else?...  
we light a candle of hope...

And for yourself, all I want for Christmas is...  
we light a candle of hope...

In all these things, God, *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down.*

Advent is a time to remember *hope* in the midst of gloom and despair. We boldly lit one candle this morning in expectation of what the prophet Isaiah told, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light". Advent takes us back to the time when the people were lost and waiting for a savior.

I think many of us feel a little lost and waiting for God to once again tear open the heavens, and do something to create national unity! Doesn't that just seem so impossible in our current climate? I know I can't envision what it's going to take for our country to come together as one. Which is why we call out to God like Isaiah, *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.....* the Bible encourages that with God, *all things are possible*. So, this Advent, let's cultivate some *hope* for national unity.

We light a candle of hope.

*All the prophet Isaiah wanted was for God to come down and save the Israelites after their return from years of captivity in Babylon in 583 before Christ. But, God wasn't too pleased with his people. See, the Israelites thought God wasn't with them in their captivity, so they just did whatever they wanted to do, which means they broke God's commandments. God was fed up with the people's wrongdoings; *there are none who call on God. God's like, even when it seems like I'm not there, you have to trust that I Am, and there's an order I wish you to follow of how I want you to live your life - individually, as a family, as a church, as a nation.* God was angry, and Isaiah tried to intervene: *Yes, we have transgressed, yes, we treat one another abysmally, but we cannot save ourselves. We recognize now that life without you is unbearable. You made us. We belong to you.**

*Save us!*

But, God is not always moved. 550 years later, at the time of Jesus, things weren't much improved. Israel was *now* under the thumb of the Roman Empire, and all the Hebrew leaders did was bicker over doctrine, morality and politics. *All the people wanted* was the Savior they had been longing for for thousands of years, to come and topple Rome. Well, guess what?! The time was now here! God *did* tear open the heavens and come down - but, they did not get the warrior savior they wanted - as we talked about last week. God had done a new thing, an unexpected thing. God sent someone to love, heal, and suffer with them as one of them. Again, God sent someone to love, heal, and suffer with them as one of them...

In our Gospel reading, that savior, Jesus, tells his disciples about the end of the world, and how only God knows when that time will be. The times are in God's hands. Only God knows what the *real* crises are. Beloved, this is what we can know... what we've been told in the bible is this: God will not leave us alone, and God will not leave us *without hope*. Jesus tells us, *Everything is going to pass away, but **my** words, all I want for you, to love and worship God, and to love your neighbors, will not pass away. My words will not pass away.*

But, here we are in 2019 - it's still not the end of the world, Jesus, and we haven't been able to make things right. Don't be angry with us, God! We cannot save ourselves. We need you to break into our troubled world again to show us how to be a harmonious and peaceful country - none of our politicians can. We need you to show us how to work out our anger and rage in ways other than guns, and domestic violence. We need you to show us how to have better marriages and family relationships. We still need you to save us from picking up a bottle to drink away our pain, on and on the list goes for all the ways in which we need you. *All the things we want for Christmas.*

We light a candle of hope that God will tear open the heavens and come down again this Christmas, but, *remember, in the same way God didn't send the Messiah the people wanted, God may not come to us in the ways we expect.*

You're looking over here, but God's over here doing such and such. (I think this is a very important aspect of God that we need to remember.)

Maybe its like this: a church member once emailed me about the world being a scary place, but they closed their note with words that seemed like God was breaking into the midst of the world's troubles like this: *God sat me down to watch clouds float across the sky this afternoon. After making cloud pictures for a while, sun rays shone through ---and the light came back into my soul--dispelling the gloom-doom that took over when I went over the top of despair. Slow down, God said, and I did...*

And there was light, in all that darkness...

I know that we can start to feel really hopeless because we don't see a way out. We can't save the world, or even ourselves. But, you know, when you get real quiet, somewhere within you, you can hear a still, small voice: *Put all your burdens down. I have them all. Sit there now... and just let me come close and love you...*

Sometimes I can only see my short timeframe, how much I just want God to be the kind of savior that puts everything right, and right now - in my life, so I can see how God made the world right, to know how certain things are going to turn out in my life, and the lives of those I love. Here's the humbling part - I want all of this now *even though people wait thousands of years for change! Thousands of years!...*

But, when I surrender the world and myself to *the God who has always been and will always be*, though the world and my life may not be right... I let God come close and love me; and God goes, love it all, anyway. Love people, anyway. Love the world, anyway. Love the church, anyway. I look out at the barren trees, the hardships and losses they've withstood, and will continue to withstand, and know that when it comes *time* for them to flower, they will. The times are in God's hands.

The truth is all I *really* want for Christmas is for my savior to come be near me in my turmoil and anguish, to be near you, and to be near our divided, troubled country.

If we keep alert, if we keep awake, we'll hear the savior's call - *it will all pass away, so love God and neighbor.*

We light a candle of hope.

Come, Lord Jesus. All we want for Christmas... is you. Amen.

