

## Isaiah 64:1-9

There is a song that is played on the radio at this time of the year which tells us that right now, at this time in our life, we all need a little Christmas. And I think most would agree. The anger and violence that began in Ferguson has spread across the nation. Decency and common sense are being tossed aside as emotions run wild. But even without Ferguson, the troubles we all face are enough to have us crying out for a little Christmas at this time in our life. There appears to be no safe haven where the storms of life cannot reach us. There is no marriage, no family that is safe. No matter who we are, or where we are, it seems that Christmas cannot come soon enough.

But even when Christmas comes, is it not true that it's just a band-aid placed over a festering wound? Christmas comes and goes, and we find ourselves right back where we started--in need of a little Christmas once more.

What we need at this time in our life is not a little Christmas, but a little Advent. We do not need to cover up our wounds with red and green band-aids dotted with sprinkles, decorations, and presents; we need to have our wounds cleansed from the inside out with true and sincere repentance.

God draws our attention to the real problem through the voice of His prophet Isaiah: "*We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy rag.*" The real problem is not the action of a police officer in Ferguson some months ago, nor is it the verdict of a grand jury, nor even our entire judicial system. The real problem is not out there; it's in here...within my very own heart.

The troubles in Ferguson and across the nation are really no different from the troubles within every marriage, and family, and congregation; the troubles at every work place and every place of learning. "*We are all unclean,*" cries the prophet, but we are not willing to admit it. Others are unclean. This we can easily see. But not me. My life is not as polluted as the lives of others. We judge by a double standard. We judge others by their actions, but we judge ourselves by our intentions.

Whether it's in Ferguson, in a marriage full of problems, in a family, or in a congregation, the Christmas that so many cry for will not help, not until Advent takes place. We need to hear God speaking through His prophet, "Repent! Stop blaming others for your troubles. All of you are like one who is unclean. There is no one who is righteous. Every one of you is sitting in a garment that is polluted."

For years we have heard that many of our nation's problems stem from the fact that Christmas has become secularized. "Season's Greetings" has replaced "Merry Christmas." Songs about Rudolf have replaced songs about the Baby Jesus. School Christmas pageants have given way to Winter Pageants. Nativity scenes have been banned from being displayed. Our nation has taken Christ out of Christmas, and now we are seeing the sad repercussions.

But this was inevitable. Of course Christmas would be stripped of its meaning! Advent was not there to prevent it. Without Advent to guard it, Christmas is a sitting duck. There is no

repentance anymore. And without a repentant heart, the true meaning of Christmas is forgotten. Without repentance, there is no need for Christ to be in Christmas. God did not send His Son into the world unannounced. He prepared His way through John the Baptist. Where is John today? His head has been cut off, and so Christmas has lost its significance. People cry out for a little Christmas, but the Christmas they cry for won't help.

And so today, for us here at Christ Lutheran Church, the cry we hear is God's cry for repentance. This is how it must be. There is hope for our festering wounds, but it does not begin with others; it begins within me. I cannot change Ferguson, or the nation, or my spouse, but God can change me. And this change begins with hearing the voice of the prophet and confessing, "Yes, I am unclean. I am not righteous. I am a sinner in need of forgiveness."

Isaiah calls God our Father in our text. What kind of father would allow his child to sit in a dirty diaper? Certainly not our Father. He is a God, says Isaiah, "*Who acts for those who wait for Him.*" This verse, perhaps more than any other, tells us what Advent is all about--God acts for those who wait for Him. What more can a helpless infant do when he is sitting in a filthy diaper, than wait for his mother or father to come? He acknowledges his misery by crying out, but he is unable to do a thing to help himself. He must simply wait for his cries to be heard.

In Advent we are reminded that God will come. Yes, the garment in which we sit is polluted. Polluted with our very own sin, not the sins and actions of others. My sins have made me filthy. And God acts. He comes, He cleanses, He soothes, He comforts. Christmas is not just in a manger on December 25th. Christmas is on the altar for you today. Christ is wrapped within the swaddling clothes of bread and wine for you. Christmas is here in the manger of the Baptismal font which made Christ to be born within you through water and the Word. Christmas is here in the announcement of God's angel who declares that God is at peace with you by forgiving your sins.

Yes, truly we all need a little Christmas, and for you who wait on the Lord, every day is Christmas. For every day God hears your cries of repentance, and He comes to change your filthy garment. Christ took your filthy garment and He wrapped Himself in it. Jesus carried the filth of your sins to the cross and there He died, but He rose again. And so in your Baptism, in Holy Communion, and in the Absolution and the preaching of the Gospel, Jesus is again and again taking your filthy garment away and giving you a clean one, the garment He bought for you with His own blood. Jesus is cleansing your wounds and healing them. His Word that comes into your ears is medicine for your soul, and your wounds are healed from the inside out.

Soon Christmas will come. But the true joy that you have as God's children is knowing that Christmas is already here. God does act for those who wait for Him. He acts in mercy for you now. He gives Jesus to you now, and your garments are no longer polluted. You are forgiven. Go in peace. Amen.