

## Advent Devotional December 4, 2020

### Scripture

Isaiah 3:1-4:1

*1 For now the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and staff—all support of bread, and all support of water—2 warrior and soldier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder, 3 captain of fifty and dignitary, counselor and skillful magician and expert enchanter. 4 And I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them. 5 The people will be oppressed, everyone by another and everyone by a neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base to the honorable. 6 Someone will even seize a relative, a member of the clan, saying, “You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule.” 7 But the other will cry out on that day, saying, “I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me leader of the people.” 8 For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. 9 The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves. 10 Tell the innocent how fortunate they are, for they shall eat the fruit of their labors. 11 Woe to the guilty! How unfortunate they are, for what their hands have done shall be done to them. 12 My people—children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths. 13 The LORD rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. 14 The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. 15 What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts. 16 The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet; 17 the Lord will afflict with scabs the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts. 18 In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; 19 the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs 20 the headdresses, the armllets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; 21 the signet rings and nose rings; 22 the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; 23 the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. 24 Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame. 25 Your men shall fall by the sword and your warriors in battle. 26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground. 4:1 Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace.”*

### Devotional

#### The Rev. Janet Duggins '90

The word of the Lord in this passage is neither comforting nor comfortable. The prophet paints a bleak picture of what the people of God can expect to face in their near future: the loss of supports and structures, resources and luxuries they have come to expect as their due; people oppressing one another; an absence of leadership; men falling victim to violence; women desperate.

Why does God intend to upend the lives of God's people in this way? Because they have stopped even pretending to be just or trying to hide their wrongdoing. They have no interest in God's ways, but they are proud of their greed and conspicuous consumption. They have become a society in which the powerful crush the people and grind the faces of the poor in the dust. Living in this way will bring on consequences, and those consequences will not be pretty.

There is only one tiny, tiny hint of relief, at the very beginning. “For now,” the prophet says, God will remove all these things the people have come to count on. For now—suggesting that perhaps the story will not end with the predicted social disintegration and suffering. But anything more in the way of words of hope will have to wait. Through the next several chapters of Isaiah, promises of restoration will only appear little by little.

This particular text doesn’t bring us there yet. Its focus is on the reckoning that has to come. It’s not comforting or comfortable, but it might not be a bad thing to sit with it a while. It seems appropriate in a year marked by a global pandemic, hundreds of thousands of deaths, widespread unemployment, the upending of structures and routines, failed leadership, confrontation with the discrimination entrenched in our systems and psyches, deep societal divisions, increased pressure on the most vulnerable, and ostensibly a worsening climate crisis. We can certainly find ourselves in this third chapter of Isaiah. We, too, are a society little concerned with God’s priorities; our way of life is unsustainable on many fronts. There has to be a reckoning. Of course, we want to find the Advent hope—skip ahead to it, even. But as always, the prophet offers better wisdom: before new hope can emerge, there has to be a reckoning. For now, we can ponder that truth.

### **Prayer**

Sovereign God, when the present is difficult and the future is uncertain, we long to hear a word of hope from you. But for now, give us the grace to be patient, we pray. Give us the willingness to hear, first, your word of truth, your demand for justice, your call to repentance. Give us the courage for the reckoning that can allow renewed hope to blossom. Amen.