**DRYSDALE UNITING CHURCH – WORSHIP @ 9**

**LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF HOPE- FROM A GOD WHO ACTS**

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**LECTIONARY: Isaiah 64: 1-9**

 **Mark 13: 24-37**

 **1 Corinthians 1: 3-9**

We could simply end the message or reflection today with how we start our service—‘share how God has been working in your life this week.’

That is where we will see, hear, experience and expect the germination of God’s presence.

When we are asked to pay attention, stop, look, and listen for God, we are being asked to keep God in our hearts and minds-constantly.

Today’s scripture invites us to take the time to see the signs and accept the grace that is already transforming our lives. God will not always intervene in our chosen time frame but when things are going badly we must trust in God- we know He acts.

The Seasons Children’s Address (which we may or may not use) asks ‘what should we do while we watch and wait for God?’

**The answer is to love God and love one another.**

The book of Isaiah from which our reading comes today, was written about 700BC at a time when the people of Israel had fallen short of God’s expectations. Isaiah lived in Judah and was a prophet to four kings. It is said that at the time Judah was saved from the Assyrian and Egyptian armies through Isaiah’s influence. I think to get 66 chapters in our bible he must have many profound things to say.

**Today is the first Sunday in Advent- a season of waiting and preparation for the** **coming of our king.** At mainly music we ensure that the nativity story is shared in a simple yet meaningful way- through song, decorating our tree and Christmas craft. Sahring the nativity story is our point of difference to the Santa story.

It is a time to prepare the way and we remember how Phil dressed up as John the Baptist a few years back- a performance to remind us how John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus.

**The Isaiah reading is really a prayer.**

A prayer for God to come down and deliver his people and make his glory known.

**It is a prayer of remembrance**, as we remember how God has acted in the past- but again not always immediately and sometimes unexpectedly. We think of Noah, Moses and Abraham.

Sharon Hollis-Moderator-Nov. Crosslight writes about God who heard the cry of the Israelites in slavery in Egypt and sent Moses to bring them out of oppression. Sharon says,’ God hears when we cry out. God desires freedom and liberation for all and is at work in the world acting for liberation of the enslaved. ( the article was about the Rohyinga displaced people)

**The Isaiah reading is also a prayer of quiet trust and waiting.**

**( with Jenni’s permission)** --she is a good example of quietly trusting in her doctor’s wisdom and patiently and graciously waiting for an outcome- keeping her faith through the rough journey. Jenni also asked me to share that she has spent much of her time giving thanks for the wonderful care and knowledge of her physicians at Univ.Hosp.

Isaiah lived about 100 years before the situation described in the text we read today.

Some say it was indeed prophetic whilst others say it may have been written by someone else.

Isaiah is envisioning what it will be like for the people of Judah after the conquering Babylonian army come through and defeats Judah and plunders and pillages the nation and takes people captive.

**It was a tough time to be people of God.**

**Some say today it is also a tough time to be people of God.**

Sit in a church pew in the south of the USA -crazed gunman. Some political leaders in African and Asian countries are plain scary. Utter poverty and climate change are other things some say are real indicators of end times.

Some in our congregation would love for God to come and act now and to make His glory known.

**In the Mark reading we hear Jesus’ final talk with his disciples before his arrest and execution.**

Jesus, in the Mark reading, in describing what the ‘end times’ might look like, simply advises us to be alert, pay attention and to learn from what is going on around us.

You may think it a little weird to be reading about ‘end times’ on the first Sunday in Advent.

My side notes in my NIV bible remind us that Jesus’ first coming was accompanied by unusual signs on earth and in the sky so it does not seem unreasonable to believe that these signs will occur literally when Jesus returns.

Jesus in this reading reminds his followers then and now to be alert and to live in expectation.

Christians know that our confidence in God to act in our worlds is because we know God has acted in the past.

We again think of biblical figures such as Noah, Jonah and Elizabeth.

We know we can trust God, we have a faithful God and we will continue to look for signs of hope- form our God who acts.

God, we know sent Jesus to be our Saviour- our sign of hope.

**The prayer from Isaiah is also instructive.**

Listen to these words from the prophets voice**, ‘you are our Father, we are the clay, you are the potter, we are all the work of your hands’.**

The song we sing, ‘take me, mould me, use me, walk beside me….’ are more instructive words.

Can I share a story of a woman from Warrnambool-Lions Convention Nov.2017- not even sure if she is a Christian but she is a good example of **‘clay used and moulded well’.** Vicki Jellie, Senior Australian of the Year Victorian rep. lost her husband to cancer 9 yrs ago?? It was his wish that Radiotherapy services should be offered in Warrnambool rather than travelling to Ballarat or Geelong- she set about fundraising and now those services are offered locally. They raised $5 million dollars locally and partnered with Epworth-State and Federal govt too- total cost 30 million. Vicki Jellie by her actions( and those of her husband) has given hope to many people.

For now our waiting this 1st Sunday of Advent becomes a season of busy and productive waiting.

We can also use this time to remember, reflect, to repent and to be restored in the faith.

God has blessed each of us with individual talent, shared skills, and community talent. So let’s use this energy as we wait in hope- for the birth of Jesus.

May we reflect on the prayer of Isaiah in the weeks to come too.

May be we could sing the ‘take me, mould me, use me walk beside me…’song whilst we vacuum, wash windows ,shop, drive in the busy weeks ahead as a reminder that we worship a God who acts and is present in our everday lives.

Can I finish with the words of our opening prayer from Abingdon…..

“Loving God, help us to be attentive to your presence.

Open our ears to hear you.

Open our eyes to see you.

Speak to our hearts and shine in our lives, that your presence may shimmer in our lives and that your love emanate from us, now and forevermore. **Amen.**

References: in part Pastor Charles Hendrickson Lutheran site,

 Seasons of Spirit and

 Abingdon.