

Sunday November 29 2020 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

**Bible Study – Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-27
“This Place Is a Mess!”**

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, share an experience of being in a messy room or house.

Isaiah 64:1-9 Context: The book of Isaiah falls into two main sections. Chapters 1-39 record the oracles and prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem, whose ministry spans the second half of the 8th century BC (roughly 742-690). Chapters 40-66 reflect the ministry of an anonymous servant who suffered and was killed in the closing days of the Exile in Babylon (which ended 539 BC), including an "epilogue" of sorts in chapters 54-66 that describe the struggles of the suffering servant's followers as the people return to Jerusalem and begin to rebuild. This week's reading begins with the people remembering the "good old days" of the Exodus and Sinai ("...tear open the heavens and come down...") and the favor God had shown them; and then becomes a lament for their sinfulness. (The verse, But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed," is obscure in the Hebrew and would seem to mean something more like: You were angry when we sinned; when you hid yourself, we transgressed.) The passage concludes with a cry for forgiveness, appealing to God as Father – one of the rare instances of this way to speak of God in the Hebrew Bible. More common is the concluding image of potter and clay.

Mark 13:24-27 Context: This week's reading concludes the "apocalyptic discourse" of Mark 13. It is the summation of Jesus' final "sermon," given after his entry into Jerusalem for the last time and before the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. It describes briefly what will accompany Jesus' return and how Jesus' disciples are to comport themselves in the meantime. The natural order of things will be disrupted, and the "Son of Man" will establish once and for all God's rule on earth (the prototype for this is to be found in Daniel 7). And while it is certain that Christ will return, no one but God knows when, and our task is to "keep awake," be prepared for that day.

Read Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-27

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-27 again

Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Share a story of preparation. (It might be preparing to go on a long trip, preparing to welcome a new family member, preparing for reconstruction work, or something else.)
- How is Advent a time of spiritual preparation? What (and Who) are we preparing for?
- How has all that has happened in 2020 shaken off a sense of complacency and normalcy? How is the season of Advent a reminder that God is with us in the chaos?
- Where do we see the writers of Isaiah and Mark affirm that even when things seem to be falling apart around us, God is faithful?
- Advent points us to three “advents” or comings of God. The first advent of God is in Jesus Christ. The second advent of God is when God returns in power and glory. The third advent of God is God coming into our lives. How might this season of Advent be a time when you can prepare yourself to experience God’s presence more fully?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Each person prays sharing their answer the following statements:

I ask God for....

I thank God for.....

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

God, who is closer to us than our breath, remind us during this season of your faithful presence. Wake us up to the messiness that exists in our lives and in our world. Help us to cling tightly to your promised presence with us and empower us to be aware of where you are at work in our world that we might join you in the mission of reconciling the world to yourself. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.