

**Sunday, December 3, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**First Sunday of Advent**  
**“Our Shocking Hope”**  
**Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-37**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “In what ways do you take time to actively look for and notice the work of God in your life and in the world?”

**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 13:24-37. 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 13:24-37.**

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 text?

### **Read Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-37 again -**

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

- Both the Isaiah and Mark passages use dramatic imagery concerning the coming or presence of God: the heavens torn open, quaking mountains (Isaiah 64:1, NRSV), boiling hot water (64:2), total darkness and stars falling from heaven (Mark 13:1-2). Describe how you can (or cannot) relate to this imagery. How do you sense the presence of God in your own life?
- The Isaiah passage is a lament. The people are offering a corporate confession for having sinned and fallen away. They describe their behavior and feelings as “like one unclean” who “fade like a leaf” (64:6). What do you think is the purpose and power in corporate confession in your own worship? Do you take time in your own devotional life to “truly and earnestly repent of your sins”? Does it make a difference?
- Isaiah also uses the image of God as potter and humankind as the clay (64:8). In what ways has your relationship with God formed you into the person you are today? How would you say you are different in Spirit than you were five years ago, ten years ago, and in your youth?
- At the close of the Isaiah passage, he says “Do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people” (64:9). If we took this seriously, in the realm of our divided churches, community, and nation, what would that look like? What might be different? Better? How would you have to change or adapt to truly believe and act as if “we are all [God’s] people”?
- Mark 13 speaks about watchfulness, especially since no one knows the specific time of the return of Christ. Do you believe the Second Coming could occur in your lifetime? If not, what is the import of this command to watchfulness? What do you watch for? For what do you get ready during Advent?
- “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*” (Mark 13:31) What are the most compelling gospel messages that for you will not ever pass away? How do those words from God guide and shape you?

### **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). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious and forgiving God, meet us in our frailty and forgive us our transgressions. We are grateful for your constancy in the midst of our divisions and conflicts. Speak the word to us that endures, so that we may share it in gratitude. Open our eyes and ears to your presence as we prepare to receive again your precious Son. **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.