

For this 1st Sunday of Advent, the prophet Isaiah's crying out to God, **"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down ..."** is unusual.

Isaiah's desperate plea was the result of a great feeling of helplessness in the face of two troubling phenomena: **the suffering** and **the sinfulness of God's people**.

Suffering: There is a story of a Jewish rabbi in the terrible time of the Holocaust. The rabbi would faithfully go to the synagogue each day and pray, **"I have come to inform you, O Lord, our God, that we are still here."**

As the toll of the slain, deported, and missing Jews increased, he still came faithfully and prayed, "You see, Lord, we are still here." Finally, he is the only Jew left alive in that town. With a heart that is numb with grief he comes to the synagogue once more and prays, **"You see, I am still here."** Then sadly he asks, **"But You, where are you?"**

Which of us in our time of personal grief has not asked that same question? Where were you, God, when my son was in that terrible accident? Where were you, God, when my wife suffered so terribly before dying of pancreatic cancer?

Or, as we view the world's enormous problem of such as the out-of-control China virus, who has not asked, **"Why doesn't God just come down and straighten this whole mess out? Then there would be no more sickness and death."** Isaiah, the most sensitive of all the prophets, was struck to the very core of his being with the suffering.

Just as troubling, however, was **the sinfulness of his people**. Jewish people more than anybody on the face of the globe, knew humanity's sinful nature. It was sin that dug a chasm between God and humanity. It was sin that made humanity unacceptable to God—for the very nature of God holiness. Listen as Isaiah prays, **"All of us have become like unclean people, like filthy rags; shriveled up like a leaf No one calls on you and you have given us over to our sins."**

These are the people of God with dirty hands and impure hearts. This sounds like us today, doesn't it? **We, too, are people with dirty hands and impure hearts.**

Somehow, we, like ancient Jews, have covered ourselves into thinking that sin is no big deal. We ignore its power to destroy our health, home and impede spiritual

growth. We disregard its power to block our view of God and we are left as slaves to our own passions.

Isaiah saw that there was no hope that Israel could save itself from its morals. The only hope was that God would come down and bring healing to his people. **“Why don’t you come down and save us not only from our suffering but also from our sin,”** Isaiah was pleading. Notice a very familiar image he uses, **“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We are all the work of your hands.”**

Isaiah knew that only God could remove the flaw from the fragile clay of humanity. That is the second reason that Isaiah cried out for God to come down to set the humanity right.

In fact, God has come down. That, of course, is what Advent is all about. From beyond time and space, in an event that surpasses our grandest attempt to get our little brains around it, God has come down. In a little obscure town outside Jerusalem, in a lowly stable, he came as a tiny babe to a humble virgin from a backward village called Nazareth. God has come down. That which Isaiah prayed for, has happened. God has come down in the person of Jesus Christ, and **he is the answer to humanity’s suffering and sin.**

There is a story of a play in 1945 written by German pastor Guenter Rutenborn. The story was set at a time when Germany was still reeling from the tragic agonizing impact of World War II. Many people were asking the question: Who was responsible for the terrible agony that World War II had brought upon the world? Characters in the play voiced the opinions of those looking for answers. Was Hitler alone responsible? How about the businesspeople who financed him? Did an apathetic German population share the blame?

Then a man comes out of the crowd and says, **“Do you want to know who is really to blame for all the suffering we’ve been through? I’ll tell you. God is to blame. He is the one that created this world. He is the one who has let it be what it is.”** Soon everyone on stage is echoing the same indictment: **“God is to blame. God is to blame.”**

And so, **God is put on trial for the crime of creating the world ... and is found guilty.** The judge sentences God to what he considers to be the worst of all sentences. He sentences God to live on this earth as a human being. Three archangels are given the task of carrying out the sentence.

The first archangel gets to the stage and sees God serving His sentence what it is like to be obscure and poor, born of a farm girl, suspicious of shame about his birth.

The second archangel adds to that penalty making God to know what it is like to fail and disappointment. No one will ever understand what he was trying to do.

The third Archangel sees that He knows what it is like to suffer an excruciating death.

Suddenly the archangels disappear from the stage and the lights go down. And the audience is left a few moments in darkness. And the reality dawns upon each member of the audience that God has already served his sentence.

Jesus is the answer to humanity's suffering and sin. He has come down, but the world has yet to receive him. What he offers is himself alone. We want hope. He is our hope. We want peace. He is peace. We want love. He is love.

The problem is, we want hope, but we don't want him. We want peace, but we don't want him. We want love, but we don't want him.

We want to achieve a world without suffering or sin, but we don't want to open our own lives so that he might begin his healing and reconciling work through us. There is no other way, however. Without him there is no hope, no peace, no love available to this world.

"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down ..." Isaiah prayed. The prayer was answered. He has come down. Now all we have to do is, to receive Him and to make Him known to a sin-filled and suffering world.

How about you? He has come down. Will you prepare yourself in this Advent and receive Him with open mind and heart at Christmas into your life?