

**Revealing what is**  
Menno Mennonite Church  
May 24, 2020  
Online Worship

**Purpose:** To explore the revealing of what God is doing even now

**Message:** The newness that we seek comes from God who makes all things new.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 64:1-8

**Synopsis:** We often struggle to contemplate the apocalyptic. We have made the notion of what is to be a foreign, fear laden thing like a horror movie. Often we associate the coming of God's spirit at the end of things as the greatest possible disaster. Yet, apocalypse is ultimately a sense of revealing what is; a notion of how things SHOULD be; how things really are. We often feel the absence of God's action and cry out for change to come. Yet, are we prepared for all that the appearance of God's future will mean for all of us? May we be given the grace to trust in this revelation even as we try to contemplate what it might all mean.

**Isaiah 64:1-9** (Tanakh)

If You would but tear open the heavens and come down,  
So that mountains would quake before You— <sup>1</sup>

As when fire kindles brushwood,  
And fire makes water boil—

To make Your name known to Your adversaries  
So that nations will tremble at Your Presence,

<sup>2</sup>When You did wonders we dared not hope for,  
You came down  
And mountains quaked before You.

<sup>3</sup>Such things had never been heard or noted.  
No eye has seen [them], O God, but You,  
Who act for those who trust in You.

<sup>4</sup>Yet you have struck him who would gladly do justice,  
And remember You in Your ways.  
It is because You are angry that we have sinned;  
We have been steeped in them from of old,  
And can we be saved?

<sup>5</sup>We have all become like an unclean thing,  
And all our virtues like a filthy rag.

We are all withering like leaves,  
And our iniquities, like a wind, carry us off.

<sup>6</sup>Yet  
no one invokes Your name,

Rouses himself to cling to You.

For You have hidden Your face from us,  
And made us melt because of our iniquities.

<sup>7</sup>But now, O Lord, You are our Father;  
We are the clay, and You are the Potter,  
We are all the work of Your hands.

<sup>8</sup>Be not implacably angry, O Lord,  
Do not remember iniquity forever.

Oh, look down to Your people, to us all!

I have heard it more than once: I wonder whether we are living in “the end of days”. That question is always with us—no matter what happens to be filling the daily news. We are always trying to divine the day and the hour, and hardly a year goes by without at least a few people declaring that they have gotten it all figured out. It is human nature—we want to know what time it is, and we would like more than anything that we, and ideally we alone, know the mind of God. But in these days in particular we have been left to wonder and consider—even a little bit—what God might be up to. And of course, we are given to suppose that we might just come to understand what this is all about. We have this odd relationship with the apocalypse. On one hand we dread the opening of the final chapter, whenever or however it may be. I remember many a night listening to the train whistles in the night, wondering what it might all mean, knowing that sooner or later the trumpets would sound. On the other hand, despite this, we too know a longing that we might see things fully and finally will be revealed, saying with generations before us “Come Lord, and soon”.

For the record, I am not going to be adding my 2 cents to the predict the end lottery. Not because I fail to be curious—like every preacher for centuries who wouldn’t want to be able to tell it all. Rather, I think that the project of trying to figure it all out has far more to do with us humans and our need to control and to predict God than it does with actually being faithful to the one who invites us to wait as a bride waiting for a bridegroom.

Yet, we pine for Apocalypse. We, like Isaiah, find ourselves longing for God to break things open, to tear the heavens and set things to right; we wish that God would reveal God for who God is and who we know God to be. We join our voices and wish that God might act like God did long ago and come in full evidence of being God. That is what we are talking about when we speak of Apocalypse. Despite its long and fanciful tradition of being disaster film fodder, Apocalypse is ultimately the revealing of the way things are, how they really can be known to be. Apocalypse means to reveal. To quote one commentator, apocalyptic writing aims “to make the invisible visible” while also “reveal[ing] the true nature of visible things.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, to call a spade a spade... if you can do that poetically. Isaiah here is speaking to those who were in exile, away from all that made them the people of God—the temple, the presence of God’s Spirit, all of it. As you can hear, the Prophet is calling on God to stand up and act, big and bold. The argument (it is an argument with God, albeit in one in the tone of Lament) goes so far as to suggest that “yes, we have sinned, but we are sinful still in your anger with us.” The

apocalypse is coming, God's revealing is coming when Israel will be restored, but Israel wishes that they could be restored now, and a good deal of apocalyptic revelation would help them get back on the right path so they could be reminded exactly who they are dealing with in YHWH God. "We know there is Sin," the prophet pleads, "Yet, remember that we are your people all the same."

Sometimes it is exactly what we wait for that can get us into trouble. Living in the desert changes you. After 10-12 weeks of blue skies and sunny roasting weather, you long for even some overcast to break the monotony. I was always impressed with the many ways TV Meteorologists in the Southwest have for phrasing "Sunny and Hot" in all its gradations. Despite the complete predictability of the weather, there is a longing for change, especially for the rains to come. There is much anticipation as you watch and wait; and when the rain does come, there is complete Joy. Once the first monsoon rains broke on a Sunday morning, and there was nothing for it but to pause the service, run outside and bask in the wet. Yet within days, the joy converts to a certain anxiety. Of course, you value every drop. But when it starts raining, and the ground becomes saturated, flooding quickly becomes a problem. What we prayed for so fervently we now hope desperately will at least slow down so we don't all wash away.

I think we are the same way with the grand revealing of God's way. God's love is revealed as a sign of hope, a promise of light, but also can be a reason for much fear and trembling as it is keen anticipation. We wish to see the revelation of God's love, for the earth to move from its tired stupor. We long for things to change or at least stabilize so we can get on with life. But we also know that when the mountains shake, we can be shaken too. We know much of the world shaken; earthquakes, virus, hurricanes, and war have become staples of the daily news. There are consequences when the world shakes; long held foundations can crumble, assumptions about safety and reality are changed, the foundational inequities of culture and life can be exposed. Those with a work-a-day job are now heroically manning the front lines. When the world moves, there are consequences. Sometimes, when things are revealed; when the apocalypse does come, we don't care for what we see. We must ask ourselves, are we really ready for the mountains to quake, for the nations to be shaken, for the power of God's world altering love to come yet again, for the coming of this love to reveal that which the present darkness hides? Are we ready for the coming of God's love into the world, ready to be a part of that love, to be changed by it, and to work for it? How will we recognize the movement of God

around us? Dare we pray for that? Dare we notice it when it does happen, is happening all around us.

I wonder; how will we participate in the work of God, the work of teaching clearly, leading boldly, loving radically, and executing justice beyond the ways of the world as it always have been? We must keep ourselves alert and awake to anticipate the moving of God, to see God's hand on the move as much as to call out "there it is; it comes" as to particularly hold ourselves in tension lest we be caught unaware of a sudden judgement. Yet we cannot be so preoccupied with what might be and reading the tea leaves that we don't do the work of the kingdom that is ours right here and now. How do we both wait for the grand revealing, and notice the curtain slowly rising in our very midst?

I think we have an opportunity to do some revealing of the way of the kingdom in the coming weeks. I do not know when we might be able to resume meeting in person again. It will come to be when the time is ripe, and that will be OK. Whenever it does happen, though, we have an opportunity to reveal the way of the kingdom of God with each other. We know well that these present circumstances have given rise to myriad interpretations and opinions as to what ought to happen where and when. Within our own body we will encounter any number of reactions and ways of being as we re-enter the world. We may well stand in contrast with one another as we arrive at differing conclusions around what is safe when and to what degree. All of that is OK, natural and completely to be expected. Let me say this right now: what ever we do, and when ever we do it, we will do it together, in a way that will bring as many people along as possible, and make every effort to leave no one behind along the way. Means, methods, and timing—all of that can be negotiated. The fact that we do what we do and are who are because we are the body of Christ—all of us, of every stripe-- that cannot be compromised, minimized, or otherwise shoved to the back ever; especially now. That means that we go out of our way to ensure that all are fed, and all are connected whenever they deem it time to return to the pew. We are revealing the best of the Kingdom of God when we are at our most deliberate in caring for one another in all things, even when we might come to differing conclusions of what care might look like.

Ahead of us lies a rare opportunity to bear witness to the deep truth of the way of Christ, an apocalypse, a revealing moment of the way of the church. I wonder, what might it reveal

about us? What will this reveal within us? How might we find our way forward into what God is doing now all around us—through us, in us, around us, and sometimes, yes, in spite of us.

As much as I look forward to the grand revealing of all things, I also give thanks for these times of revealing as God's kingdom shows itself time and again on earth as it is in heaven.

Come Lord; and soon. Come in us now and reveal yourself. And should this be the moment of fully revealing may we be given courage to cry out “blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”