

Advent 1, December 3, 2023
Text: Isaiah 64:1-9
Theme: Save Us Lord!

Danya and I have been watching “Young Sheldon” on Netflix and there is an episode where Sheldon decides that he is so smart and so mature that he no longer needs his parents. He can take care of himself as an adult. The mother on the episode agrees and stops making him dinner or lunches, cuts off the allowance and treats him as another adult living in the home. Sheldon struggles with adulting but he is doing fine overall... until the storm hits. When the tornado sirens are going off, the wind is howling and the family is sitting in the dark with the power out, Sheldon suddenly becomes a 9-year-old again and wants his mom. Adulting is fun until the storm hits and things start sliding sideways.

It occurs to me that we behave towards God a lot like Sheldon behaves towards his parents. When things are going swell and everything is in its place, we sometimes begin to think that God is nice but not wholly necessary. It is not like we lose our faith, but we relegate God to a back burner in life and do what we want up in front. Oh, I know that I’m ignoring God and doing things that He forbids or failing to do things that He commands but He’ll be fine, sitting back there on that far burner – you know, the little one that’s just for keeping stuff warm. You don’t really use it that much. And life goes merrily along... until it doesn’t when the storm hits and things start sliding sideways.

We get a bad diagnosis from the doctor. We lose our income. Our kid gets in trouble. Something out of our control sweeps us off our feet and staggers us with a gut-punch. We don't know what to do or where to turn and suddenly, there is God, sitting back there on that little burner where we put him. We cling on to him with all our might and He, true to His promise, lifts us up in His arms and carries us through the storm. He never holds a grudge for being "back-burnered." He never turns His back on us because we ignored Him. He never treats us as we treated Him, as though we don't matter, as though we can be ignored. He is always there for us, every single time.

The people of God to whom the prophet Isaiah spoke had done the same nonsense that we do today. They had forgotten God or they had relegated Him to that little, inconsequential, back-burner. They had capitulated to foreign rulers instead of standing firm as God's people. They had made deals with other foreign rulers to protect themselves from threats. They had intermarried with heathen and started compromising with their religions and worshipping at heathen altars, thus watering down the faith they had in Yahweh. And now the hammer had come down and they were exiled to Babylon. Like Sheldon in the tornado, suddenly the people of God did not feel so big, so competent, so independent, and in this text from Isaiah, we hear the cry of God's people for Him. But Isaiah says to God, "There is no one who calls upon your name, who

rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities."

Do you want to see God's face? That's a tough question. The answer for most of us is "Yes and no." When I am sitting in church, singing and praying, yes, I want to see His face. When I am involved in sin and hiding from God, no, I do not want to see His face. People never change. We are all like Sheldon. When life is good, we ignore God and when there is a tornado, we suddenly want Him right there with us. The people shouted, "Hosanna" as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and they shouted "Crucify him!" five days later. But we give thanks that God is not fickle like us. St. Paul says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here is the good news, the great news, the wonderful news: No matter how much we have sinned, no matter how much we have offended God and everyone else, God is faithful to His promise and He has promised to deliver us from sin, death and the devil. During Advent, we are reminded of the people to whom Isaiah preached. They had ignored God too long and now the day of their judgement had come and they were being exiled to Babylon. This text comes to us during Advent because we are preparing ourselves for Christ's return. When He returns, we want Him to find us faithfully doing the work of the Church that He gave us to

do while He is away. Advent is a time for us to take inventory of our lives and ask ourselves, "where is God for us?"

Is God at the center of your life? Are you striving to serve Him every day with all that you have and all that you are? Or is He on the little back-burner? Is He sitting in the background while all the business of the world swirls around you. Are you feeling overwhelmed? Are your kids making choices that break your hearts? Does your employer fail to recognize the good that you do but is always ready to pile on more work and more criticism? Are you lonely and sad during this time when everyone is supposed to be happy? Or are you just feeling blah about everything as though you are going through the motions because that is what is expected? If any of this is true for you, check to see where God is. Is He speaking to you in Bible Study every week and Bible reading every day? Is He feeding you with His body and blood every week? Maybe you will discover that God has accidentally been shoved unto that tiny back burner.

I was cooking a big family dinner one time about 20 years ago. I had waited to boil the potatoes until last so that they would be hot when we ate. In the midst of all the shuffling on the stove top, the giant pot of water for the potatoes got stuck on that back burner. Twenty minutes later, the water was still not boiling. Finally my mother figured out that the pot was on the back burner, the little warming burner. She shuffled

everything around on the stove and moved the potatoes to the front burner. However, by the time the potatoes were ready, everything else was cold.

I looked at that pot of potatoes and thought about my faith. How often had I, in all the busyness of my life, put God on that back burner? Even I, a pastor, found it too easy to do so I cannot imagine how easy it is for people who are only in this building once a month or twice a year. When we talk about our calling to make disciples of all nations, we're not really talking about setting up a camp in Borneo or launching a huge door to door evangelism campaign. We're talking about being like my mother with the potatoes. She just helped me see the importance of moving the potatoes to the front burner. Likewise, our calling is to help others see that God is on their back burner. As important as work or sports might seem, God is more important. As crucial as it might seem to catch up on sleep on the weekend, feeding our faith is far more crucial. That is our calling. We call people to God. We call over and over as long as we have breath in our bodies, we call people to come and feed their faith, to move God to the front burner of their lives because that is what brings true joy and complete peace, and nothing else does that.