Session One: What Are We Waiting For?

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1–9; Mark 13:24–37
Central Question: What does it mean to wait for God in a world that seems increasingly uncertain?

Key Points

Isaiah 64:1–9

- Isaiah 64 belongs to a larger communal lament in Isaiah 63–64. The prayer reflects a community experiencing devastation, disappointment, and God's apparent absence. Its historical background is associated with the experiences of exile and restoration, although its precise date remains uncertain.
- The community recalls God's earlier saving activity, particularly the Exodus and God's manifestation at Sinai. The imagery of fire, trembling mountains, and torn heavens expresses a longing for God to intervene once again.
- The people acknowledge their wrongdoing while raising difficult questions about God's anger and hiddenness. Their prayer combines confession, complaint, and an appeal for divine mercy.
- The community addresses God as Father and potter, identifying itself as the work of God's hands. Despite its circumstances and unfaithfulness, the people continue to appeal to their covenant relationship with God.

Mark 13:24–37

- Mark 13 is commonly called the Little Apocalypse. The discourse follows Jesus' prediction of the Jerusalem Temple's destruction and is closely associated with the First Jewish–Roman War, during which the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE.
- The passage draws upon Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, using imagery of cosmic upheaval, the coming of the Son of Man, and the gathering of God's chosen people to describe anticipated divine intervention and restoration.
- Jesus speaks of approaching events and declares that “this generation” will not pass away before their fulfillment, while also stating that nobody knows the precise day or hour. The relationship between these statements remains a significant question of biblical interpretation.
- Jesus concludes with illustrations involving a fig tree and an absent householder. The fig tree illustrates how approaching events may be recognized, while the

householder entrusts responsibilities to servants who do not know when their master will return. Watchfulness relates to continuing responsibility.

Reflection Questions

1. When you think about Advent, what do you understand Christians to be waiting for?
2. What do you notice about the way the community in Isaiah 64 speaks to God, and what might that suggest about faithful waiting?
3. In Mark's illustration of the absent householder, what does it mean to remain watchful when everyone has already been given work to do?
4. What might it look like for us, individually and as a congregation, to practice both Isaiah's honest lament and Mark's call to faithful responsibility during Advent?

Summary

Advent is a season of remembrance and expectation. Christians remember God's coming among humanity in Jesus Christ while anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises. Isaiah reminds us that faithful waiting can include lament, questioning, confession, and continued appeal to God. Mark emphasizes watchfulness and responsibility amid uncertainty about the future. Together, these passages invite us to consider how hope can shape our relationship with God and our participation in the world while we wait for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Looking Ahead to Session Two

As we consider what it means to wait faithfully for God, what might it mean to prepare the way for God's coming?