

What Have You Done for Us Lately?

November 30, 2008

(Advent 1 - Year B)

Isaiah 64: 1-9

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When my little brother and I were kids, we had this Bible that we read called *The Children's Bible*.

And this Children's Bible was published by Golden Press, the same publisher that still publishes many children's books known as Golden Books.

In this Children's Bible, the various stories from the Old and New Testaments were told in a shortened form, so that kids could more easily understand the Bible stories.

And this Children's Bible was heavily illustrated - with lots and lots of pictures of the stories in the Bible.

Sometimes, our bedtime stories came from this Children's Bible, and the pictures would always illicit lots of questions from my brother and me about these sacred stories.

I can still vividly remember the pictures in this Children's Bible, especially the pictures that any little boy would think were cool, such as:

A picture of the plague of locusts that God sent swarming on the Egyptians so that Pharaoh would let the Hebrew people go.

I remember a picture of Joshua and his strapping warriors marching around Jericho until the walls came tumbling down on the bad guys.

And, a picture of the Apostle Peter busting out of his jail cell with the help of a big 'ole white-winged angel.

Yet, when my brother and I were tucked into our beds as our Mom told us Bible stories as bedtime stories,

My brother and I would look at these pictures of the cool stuff that God did in the Bible, and we would ask our mother:

"Mom, how come God did all this cool stuff in Bible times,

But God doesn't send locusts or knock down walls or bust people out of

jail any more?”

I can't remember exactly how my mother got out of this tough theological question.

But I think that she told us that God intervened and acted in people's lives in Bible times, and God still intervenes and acts in people's lives today - but just in different ways.

That answer was good enough for my brother and I to stop asking questions and go to bed.

But, as a little boy, I still wanted to see God do the incredible acts of intervention that I saw pictured in our Children's Bible.

I still wanted to ask:

“God, what have you done for us lately?”

In our Scripture reading today from Isaiah, the Prophet Isaiah pleads for God to do incredible acts of intervention on behalf of the Israelites. The Israelites have spent centuries in Exile in Babylon and have now come home to their beloved Jerusalem.

However, when the Israelites get home, they see that their homes are no longer standing and that their beautiful Temple is destroyed.

So the prophet Isaiah pleads for God to intervene, saying:

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.”

The children of Israel open up their Children's Bible and see all the pictures of the cool stuff that God used to do for them, and Isaiah pleads out to God:

“O that you would do all the amazing things that you used to do. For 'when you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains quaked at your presence.'”

The children of Israel return to their homes after the Exile and they stare at the ruins of their beloved Temple.

The children of Israel plead for God to intervene like he used to do - and they ask God:

“God, what have you done for us lately?”

Personally, I know what it is like to ask for God to intervene.

Yesterday afternoon, I remembered how Baylor University is sometimes

called "Jerusalem on the Brazos."

I recalled that famous football game in 1974, when God *did* intervene and Baylor beat Texas, in the game that is still called "the Miracle on the Brazos."

And remembering the awesome deeds of God from of old, I pleaded to God yesterday afternoon, using the words of the prophet Isaiah: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence -
And so that Baylor would beat Texas Tech and send the Texas Longhorns to the National Championship game."

Yet, even though Baylor almost pulled off the upset, my cries for God's intervention were not answered the way I wanted.

And now my team's fate is no longer in God's hands, but in the hands of the BCS - as I asked God:

"God, what have you done for the Longhorns lately?"

The season of Advent begins today.

In this season of Advent, we wait with expectation for God to intervene on our behalf.

In the season of Advent, we cry out, like the Prophet Isaiah, for God to tear open the heavens and come down to save us.

In the season of Advent, we ask what God has done for us lately -
And then we wait for the mountains to quake and the locusts to swarm and the walls to come tumbling down and for big 'ole white-winged angels to bust people out of jail.

Yet, God chooses a different way to intervene on our behalf.

In the fullness of time, God did not come down and shake the mountains.

Instead, God comes down to intervene as a human being - a human being named Jesus who loves us, no matter what.

In the fullness of time, God did not send swarms of noisy locusts to attack the bad guys.

Instead, God comes down on a silent night - with sheep and oxen to attend to his cradle.

When my Mom read us stories from the Children's Bible, I wondered why God does not intervene in the powerful and loud and amazing

ways that I saw illustrated.

And my Mom's explanation was right:

God *does* still intervene and act in people's lives today, but in different ways.

God still intervenes and acts in our lives today, but in the ways of Jesus - in the ways of silence and stillness and love.

Two weeks ago, I was not having a very good day.

A man who had come to our church office a few times before for financial assistance came walking in, wanting money to purchase a bus ticket to Dallas.

This man was respectful and grateful for the assistance we had given to him previously.

I gave him a check from my discretionary fund made out to Greyhound for the bus fare to Dallas.

As I gave him the check, he got tears in his eyes - and he grabbed me in a bear hug and said:

"I just wanted to give you a hug - and tell you that God loves you."

God did not intervene in my life that day by quaking the mountains or doing any of the things that I remember from that illustrated Children's Bible.

But God *did* intervene in my life - through the hug of a smelly man with missing teeth and no money for a bus ticket.

During Advent, we ask God to intervene in our lives, pleading:

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

And God answers - by tearing open the heavens, each and every day, to tell you that he loves you.

For that is what God has done for you lately.

AMEN.