Isaiah 64:6-8 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Advent! Yes, it means “coming.” As we have spoken of in the past, there are really two thoughts that encompass the season of Advent, but as you study those two thoughts it is clear that really we are speaking of one hope with two different stages. Let me explain what I mean.

Again, Advent means “coming.” It is called the season of Advent because we want to take the time to contemplate the coming of the Lord. That is the key point of Advent, the coming of the Lord! The two sub-points or stages that I spoke of are this. One that we contemplate the coming of Jesus the first time, in other words we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming celebration of Christmas and the joy that this celebration brings. The second point is like it. That we contemplate the coming of Jesus the second time, the coming of the Great Day of Judgment along with the joy and celebration this day will bring! That’s what Advent is about. The coming of the Lord, his coming the first and the second time!

What better way to get ready for this coming than to contemplate the words of our text. Our text is a prayer of Isaiah, a prayer that acknowledges sin and puts our souls directly into the hands of the Lord. Let’s contemplate these words under the theme: **OUR FATHER, THE LORD.**

I must confess that I deliberately used those words for our theme. At least twice we are reminded of our relationship with God as we read, **“You, O Lord, are our Father.”** How true those words are. In just contemplating those words my mind is immediately taken to the words of the Lord’s Prayer and how it starts: “**Our Father, who art in heaven.”** Luther in his explanation of these words says, *“With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.”* In other words, those with faith have a relationship with God. He is the “Dear Father”, that is, a compassionate, loving, and caring parent in a relationship with a “dear child” the offspring, loving, cared for, and because of youth often in need of instruction and guidance. In other words there is relationship here. And that relationship is “dear,” “tender” and “true.”

It is on the basis of that “dear, tender and true” relationship that our prayer makes its appeal. Why? Because it is clear that the children have strayed. The children, in this case the children of Israel, have wandered away from and hardened their hearts to the Lord. The words of our highlighted verses most adequately speak of the problem when it says, **“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”**

Needless to say, this problem of the children of Israel is not just their problem. In truth it is the problem of every single human being who has ever lived. Because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin has invaded our world. It is sin that is being described here. Not a single human is dismissed from this problem and if you want to understand the truth of that then just use Scripture’s easiest measure of sin. The easy measure of whether or not you have sin is found for us in Roman 6:23, **“The wages of sin is death.”** There it is! If you can die, then it is clear that you have sin!

But just to make sure we understand the depth of our sin, then please take a moment with me and let’s contemplate the meaning of our text. This verse opens by saying, **“All of us have become like one who is unclean.”** Notice the “All”! What it is saying is that everyone is “unclean”. To grasp the depth of this all you need to know is that the only “clean” being is the Holy and perfect God. That’s our standard of measurement. Not those around us. God wants us to be clean like he is clean but this verse lays out our problem. We are “unclean.” We fail to measure up to the Lord our God.

The text goes on, “**and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** With these words, God in a very picturesque way is telling you “you are a filthy rag.” Even when you think you look good, even when you think you are good, even when you think you couldn’t be any better, God reminds you that your idea of your righteousness and His righteousness are two different things. Compared to the Lord, our goodness is nothing but dirty rags, rags that are not good for anything. In truth the Hebrew implies that these are bloody rags, rags best thrown out and not used again. Again, very pointed and very picturesque.

There is more. **“We all shrivel up like a leaf.”** You know what that picture is don’t you? We are still in that season when the leaves are dropping from the tree. The shriveled leaves…the dead leaves. No longer useful to the tree leaves. Let that sink in.

And that next line too, **“like the wind our sins sweep us away.”** Think of those gusty days that we have had in the past year. Nobody likes to be outside when the wind is blowing that way. But this is a wind that sweeps away, so think in terms of a tornado or perhaps a hurricane. That’s the problem of our sins.

Verse 7 of our text in true parallelism repeats this same truth but in different words. It says, **“No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.”** There is the plight of sin. We forget the Lord. We abandon Him and don’t even care. And even though the Lord is patient and gracious, there can be a time when the Lord just says, “Enough!” Then the Lord hides from us and the Lord just lets us wallow in our sins and the destruction they bring. If anything, this verse makes me think of what’s going on in today’s world. Look at how people have no regard for the Lord, for morality or even for what is good and right. In many cases they are selfish and self-centered and think they can do whatever they want and no one should ever tell them they are wrong. Breaking the law is a way of life for many.

But these words also speak to us too. We, yes, even we who call ourselves Christian and God’s children oftentimes put God on the back burner of our lives. We might go to church if nothing else interferes. We might give the Lord the time of day or an offering if there isn’t something else we would rather do! And are we not the adults responsible for letting our young drift away from the Lord? We take the attitude, “I want them to choose their own religion someday.” Not only is that directly contrary to God’s Word which is bad enough, but you are simply going to let your child soak in the world’s anti-christian, anti-Bible falsehoods! In other words you are teaching your child unbelief! That’s fine, if the Bible and the message of Jesus is utterly false but if it is true, where are you pushing your child? I wonder, I fear, that what these words said to the people of Israel are also words that fit us today. Fit us to a tea, and we should be afraid! Afraid because we have become just like the people of Israel and cast aside the Lord!

But in truth, to grasp this horror of sin, is our hope and is God’s directing hand. You do realize that is the purpose of the Law, to help us see our sins and then recognize our desperate need of a Savior! That’s where the next words of our text take us. They say, **“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father.”** You are the compassionate and gracious God. You are the God who in love and care desires to forgive our sins and to grant us your peace and eternity. You are the Father who sees our troubles, who directed history to solve that trouble and who in your Son grants us grace and mercy. That’s the idea behind this appeal to our Lord, our Father in heaven, who so loved us that He gave his Son for our sins.

And what a marvel it is to look at and speak of Jesus our Savior. Think of how Jesus fits into this picture of the words of our text: **“We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”** I fear the biggest problem with this verse is that people want to use it to justify whatever evil and horror they want to do because they want to simple apply these words individually. That can be done, but do so only with a Biblical basis and not a human mentality.

So what are these words speaking of? They are speaking of the Lord’s plan and actions in this world to bring about the salvation of mankind. Speaking of how God causes nations to rise and fall, or how God’s hand directs and moves history so that His Word and His promises come true. Yes, how God allows the evil of this world to fulfill his purpose or how God in his wisdom and majesty causes all things at all times to work for the good of salvation and His glory. Not sure what I mean? Let’s review some quick Bible history.

Joseph. Sold into slavery by his brothers all for the purpose that God’s people might be saved many years later from a severe famine and to fulfill the promise that Abraham’s descendants would live in Egypt for 400 years before taking possession of the Promised Land.

Moses. Raised in the household of Pharaoh though he should have died. Then a shepherd in the wilderness being trained. Finally, the deliverer of God’s people from slavery, who with signs, miracles and wonders from the Lord proclaimed the Lord’s greatness before the known world.

Mary. That humble young woman who at the Lord’s bidding became the mother of our Savior Jesus. Mary bore shame and grief because even though she was a virgin with child, few probably believed her. Even Joseph didn’t believe her and were it not for the intervention of the Lord would have never taken her for his wife.

Jesus. Son of God and son of Man. Lived a perfect life in order to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And though Jesus did nothing but good, did awesome and multitudes of wonders such as had never been seen before, who spoke and revealed the truth of God, yet Jesus was put on the cross. People because of sin hated Jesus and in religious fury murdered him little realizing that they were fulfilling God’s plan of salvation.

Do you see, how God has acted and moved for the good of salvation, that all might hear of this wonder of God’s love and come to grasp how God offers each of us the joy of life with him if only we would believe?

Now, remember, I said we could apply these words to us individually if we kept a Biblical perspective. Consider this verse and its message. 2 Ti 2:20-21 **“In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”**

As we learned in Bible class this week those words tell us our job for the Lord. We cleanse ourselves by faith in Jesus, by clinging to his hope and victory and by working to be a people for noble purposes. We are clay that strives to serve the Lord not evil. It is such a simple verse and yet it says so much to each of us. We are the pots the Lord has made to serve Him and his name!

Lord, help us see our sins. Help us grasp your grace. Help us to be instruments to the glory of your Name. Amen.