

Before They Call

"Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down." (Isaiah 64:1)

Just off the coast of Italy, at 9:45 p.m. on January 13, 2012, the cruise ship Costa Concordia sailed too close to land and collided with a ridge of submerged rocks, leaving a large gash in the hull. Water flooded the below-deck compartments, causing the ship to tip over to one side. Thankfully, favorable winds pushed the ship back toward land, where it ran aground. Otherwise, it would have sunk, resulting in a tragedy worse than the Titanic. Of 4,229 persons aboard the Costa Concordia, thirty-two died. The subsequent investigation laid blame on the captain. He not only mis-steered the ship, he knew that they'd struck the rocks and that the ship was going down, but he delayed the distress call, apparently to cover up his poor judgment. The investigation report called his actions "unbelievable," and concluded that if the "mayday" had only gone out sooner, many, if not all of those lives could have been saved.

Isaiah 64 opens with a distress call to God. Isaiah's scroll of prophecies speaks into our human tragedy. Spiritually, we have suffered a catastrophic collision. We are sinking. But, unbelievably, our self-appointed captains assure us they have things under control. So, the prophet warns us. Quit the cover-up and call out to God, to the God "who takes action for those who wait for Him" (Isaiah 64:4b).

Isaiah clarifies our distress situation. We know that something has gone wrong with the world. But what we normally notice are surface symptoms. The deeper problem is that we broke ourselves against the bedrock of God's will for His creation. And we're too ashamed or too preoccupied to cry out and ask for help. That's the source of all our other problems, Isaiah says. "There is no one who calls upon [God's] Name, no one who rouses himself to take hold of [God]" (Isaiah 64:7a). The problem isn't just that our ship is sinking. The problem is that we tried to set a course without God as our Father. God's will for His creation isn't just a search-and-rescue operation to get us out of distress. God's will is to get us back on His ship, back into His family, with His Son, the crucified and risen Jesus as our Confidant and Captain.

When the Costa Concordia was in distress, its captain was too proud to ask for help. Many people died as a result. Most, however, were saved. Not just because of the favorable winds, but also because of the proactive Italian search-and-rescue crews. They had enough information to know that something had gone wrong. And they responded to the situation even before the distress call went out. And so with God, as He spoke through Isaiah, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to

be found by those who did not seek Me ... Before they call I will answer" (Isaiah 65:1a, 24a).

God sent His Son to save us, not because we asked, but because He loves us. God wants you to call on Him, not because He needs the information, and not just because He wants to rescue you *from* distress. He wants to rescue you *for* a new life--a life that trusts Him, a life that has His Word living inside you, and a life responding with His love to others, even before they call (whether in distress or not).

So, family, during the season of Advent, we will prepare to celebrate the birth of God's Son, who was given (called) the name Jesus for a reason—a Hebrew name that means "God saves." However, in addition to His earthly name, Holy Scripture calls Jesus by various titles that describe something about His person or work. Thus, we will examine the four titles given to Jesus also in Isaiah 9:6—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and finally Prince of Peace.

Therefore, Jesus has answered our calls for mercy and salvation, even before we actually uttered the words. But, now, the promise has been fulfilled: the Word has become flesh and salvation, our salvation, has become a reality.

Let's have a blessed Advent Season!

Pastor Seehafer