**Sunday, December 6th, 2020**

**Isaiah 40:21-31**

A church member contacted her Pastor and asked to get together with him

          for some counseling.

When they met, she told him her husband had become distant.

Her children were rebellious.

They were deeply in debt.

And she was having medical problems.

The more she talked the more depressed the Pastor became.

He began to think her case was hopeless. There was no way out.

But he wanted to help her.

He was silent for several moments as he pondered the situation.

Finally, he asked: "Tell me… how did you become a Christian?"

The question surprised her.

But as she began to answer it,

          her appearance changed from sadness, fear, and frustration,

          to thoughtfulness, and near excitement as she told him

          her story of how she encountered God and learned to trust Jesus.

By the time she was finished,

          she was speaking as though she had come into the Pastor's office

          for the express purpose of telling him how much she loved her Savior.

She felt better.

The Pastor felt better.

Her situation had not changed.

Her husband had not changed.

Her children were still rebellious.

The family was still in debt.

And she was still facing a medical crisis.

What had changed was her focus.

She was no longer focused on her difficulties and problems.

Instead, she remembered God's great love for her, and her love for Jesus.

That restored her hope and strength and helped her to cope with her problems.

The prophet Isaiah worded it a bit differently:

          "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

          They will soar on wings like eagles;

          They will run and not grow weary,

          They will walk and not be faint."

When we are focused on our problems and difficulties,

          we grow tired, and discouraged, and frightened.

But when we put our trust in God,

          and remember he loves us,

          and is always with us,

          we realize that with God's help we will get through it all.

Isaiah frequently asked:

          Do you not know?

          Have you not heard?

          The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

We have heard.

And we do know God is with us.

But, like the woman who discussed her problems with the Pastor,

          we can easily be overwhelmed by the problems around us.

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one,

          and calls forth each of them by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

When we look up, we remember:

          God created us.

          God calls to each one of us by name.

          Not one of us is missing from his love and devotion.

As we read through the Bible,

          we discover "come" is one of God's favorite words.

Come, let us talk about these things.

All you who are thirsty, come and drink.

Come to me all of you who are tired and have heavy loads,

           and I will give you rest.

Come follow me.

God is a God who invites.

God is a God who calls.

And especially at this time of year,

          He urges us to: Come to the manger.

God is always near us, always with us.

We may forget Him, but God will never forget us.

He gave us his promise:

          "Remember I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

The time of Advent is a time of waiting and preparing

          for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

We need an abiding sense of God's presence.

In the gloomiest hour, when the lights of this world are so dim,

          we need to know He is here watching over us.

Any doubt of the Father's love disappeared

          the night God was wrapped in barnyard towels

          so the hay would not scratch his back.

Advent is time to remember what we already know,

          a time to remember what we have heard:

                    God is with us.

                    God loves us.

                    Always.

Amen