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Advent 1B
Peace, Seattle
November 27, 2011
Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

LET 'ER RIP

What is it about Wal-Mart that inspires people to such ferocity?
- Customer riots over $2 wafflemakers?[1]
- Parking lot hold-ups by thieves demanding Black Friday booty?
- A police-deployed tasers for taking down suspected shoplifters?
- Pepper spray—the latest accessory for achieving a competitive edge over other bargain hunters?[2]

According to ShopperTrak 210,000 people squeezed into the Mall of America Friday, setting a new record.[3] Black Friday store receipts are up 7% over last year; online sales are up a whopping 25%. They didn't say whether shopping related violence (how's that for a new category of crime?) followed suit.

When Jesus said KEEP AWAKE, I don't think midnight mall binges was what he had in mind!

O THAT YOU WOULD TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN!
God, we don't know our right hand from our left.
Our struggle against the void is so acute we'll sacrifice just about anything to fill it.
Our values are so upside down, we hardly recognize ourselves.

TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN—REDEFINE HOPE FOR US!

Something is afoot in the world. We've witnessed it all year. In country after country, people—fed up—have been taking to the streets. It started with Arab spring…and now Occupy Wall Street.

The anger, frustration, and indignation of ordinary people compelled to say THE SYSTEM ISN'T WORKING ANYMORE. Compelled to say WE'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT SITTING DOWN. Compelled to say IT'S TIME FOR REGIME CHANGE.

This word from Isaiah, the first word out of the block for this Advent season, compresses and channels that impatience with life and cranks up the volume:

TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN, GOD!
MOVE THE MOUNTAIN! STOKE THE FIRE! BRING THE POT TO BOIL!

And in his cry, the prophet's voice joins with all those who, from ancient times, have been waiting, mostly impatiently, for God's promises to take on flesh.

What do we need this Advent? Not a God who stays aloof, who's off in heaven somewhere, above it all, but rather a God who will stand with us in the public square.

Give us the big gesture, Lord, the special effects; unassailable proof of your existence, God.
Come on our terms.
The truth is, God has never been very good at coming to us on our terms. To put it another way, God is always and forever surprising us, flying below the radar of our expectations.

[1] Go to: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/25/waffle-maker-riot_n_1113293.html?1322251334
[2] Read the details @ http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2011-11-26/black-friday-pepper-spraying/51410606/1
[3] Dee-Ann Durbin, The Associated Press. Read more @ http://www.seattlepi.com/default/article/Black-Friday-sales-up-7-pct-retailers-look-ahead-2293972.php

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When God took on flesh in Jesus, we didn't recognize him.

He "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." He was, says Isaiah, "despised and rejected…and we held him of no account." (Isaiah 53:3)

Generations of the faithful stretching back farther than we can imagine have prayed for God to come down to set the world back on its axis. He moved in right next door and we had no clue.

If only God had made it more obvious. If only we'd have paid attention.

How will God become enfleshed for us this Advent? Let's keep awake. Keep watch. Keep open. And be ready to be once again surprised.

Prayer:
Lord, come among us as you have promised this Advent, not on our terms, but your own, and help us to recognize you when you come. Like a Potter take the raw material of our lives and shape them into that vessels with a purpose, vessels that hold up, that endure. Earthen jars that bear the treasure of Good News and share it with the world. Amen.