

## ADVENT DEVOTION: NOVEMBER 27, 2002

### ISAIAH 1:1-9

#### LEARNING THINGS THE HARD WAY

I was about 6 years old when my father and I were standing in the backyard. He was preparing to light up our charcoal grill and cook some burgers for dinner. He lit the match and noticed that I was intrigued and mesmerized by the little flame on top of the little stick. He said to me, "Do you want to touch it? I will let you if you want to."

This surprised me, because I remembered him saying that fire was dangerous and that it could hurt you. Looking back on it, part of me questions the judgment of my dad to let his son burn himself. But another part of me totally gets it. Touching the flame would have at worst caused me a 1st degree burn, but it would have taught me a life lesson...to be really careful when it comes to fire. Sometimes we learn things the easy way. Sometimes we learn them the hard way.

When I became a parent, I found it hard to watch my children learn things the hard way. When they were toddlers it was my job to not let them wander into the road or eat something that would make them sick. But as they got older I began to understand that sometimes they wouldn't truly learn the lesson until they experienced the natural consequences of their actions.

The book of Isaiah opens with the prophet speaking for God, essentially saying, "I raised you better than this!" "Why do you keep having to learn these things the hard way?! The lessons to be learned are about turning their backs on God, doing evil, and dealing corruptly. The consequences would result in being conquered by the Babylonians and exile.

Here at the beginning of Advent, as we prepare for Christ to enter in, we are invited to consider the things we have learned the easy way, and the things we are learning the hard way, both individually and collectively. From the state of the planet to the plight of the most vulnerable among us, we still have lessons to learn, and we have invitations from God to change our ways.

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the lessons you have learned the hard way in your life. What lessons are you learning right now?
2. In what ways do we perpetuate a society that, like Isaiah told ancient Israel, deals corruptly and forsakes God and God's ways? What is one thing you and I can do differently?

~Bill Buchanan