

Standing in Two Worlds

We Christians stand with our feet planted in two worlds. That planting is nowhere more evident than today, our first Sunday of Advent. Last week, we completed our year of living with, walking with, and listening to St. Luke as he opened for us the life and mystery of Jesus. Since Easter, we have walked with Jesus; with Luke as our guide; the long, dusty road from Galilee up to Jerusalem.

We walked with him as he brought hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, as the lame walked, as the poor rejoiced. Our journey ended last Sunday, with Christ the King, nailed to his throne. And I ask you: were you changed by this journey? Has your sense of who Jesus is and what he calls us to become, changed through the journey of this last year?

We stand with one foot firmly planted in what is. The life our Lord lived 2000 years ago; the life we each of us live each day. Yet Advent is the season of the great reminder. Reminding us that we also live with our other foot firmly planted in what will be.

The life of Jesus was full of laughter and miracles and wine and friendship. It was also full of betrayal and loss and death. As followers of Jesus, we probably should expect the same for ourselves. But Advent says that life is not defined only by our experiences here and now. Advent is the promise that, despite what seems to be only circles of time, as in: "I can't believe it's nearly Christmas again!"; despite what seems to be the same ole same ole, day in and day out, Advent stands as the "Angel to Remind Us" that God is moving and working and shaping our world and ourselves to an end that is pleasing to God.

That end will be an end: an end to life as it appears to be; and the beginning of life as it actually is in the sweep, in the nearness of God. This is the promise of Advent!

And while it may seem vague or elusive, that promise is more substantial than the walls of this church. But it is also a promise that will shake us to our core. As we grasp for safety and security, Advent shouts that while our lives are secure in God; God is never safe.

Jesus today compares God to a thief breaking into your home and mine. Sit with that image. God the cat burglar!

For anyone who has been burglarized, you know the feelings of outrage and invasion; of fear and insecurity. Make no mistake, Jesus knew exactly what he was saying when he likened God to a thief breaking in.

God is an intrusion, God is a violation of my space, an uninvited interruption: this is the Advent of God: Unexpected, Unwanted, yet Undeniable and Unstoppable. If you think this isn't so, ask yourself when the last time was you gave yourself fully,

without reservation, over to God's will in your life. And if you have, what followed once you did?

We don't know when God shall be revealed in all of his fullness. Jesus didn't know when. Our friends who waste time calculating the end have entirely missed the point of the Advent of God. We cannot know when. We can only live as if "when" is *today*. One foot in today, the other foot standing in hopeful, if tremulous, expectation.

Living in the Advent of God, today, is to "live a caught-up life, not a put-off life, so that wherever you are, you are ready for God. Ours may be the generation that finally sees him ride in on the clouds, or, we may meet him as they have for generations past; one by one, as we each close our eyes for the last time." Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven*.

Because our God is not safe or domesticated; because he comes breaking in when we least suspect, the Advent of God is a time to be afraid. Fear of God runs from the first pages of Scripture to the last.

Yes, I say to you, fear God.

Because when you fear God, and God alone, there is nothing else to fear. Fear God, and you will not fear other people. Fear God, and you will not fear places or things. Fear God, and you will not fear death.

When you fear God, and God alone, you are able to stand at the burning bush with Moses; you are able to stand in the Temple, behind the curtain, with Zechariah; you are able to stand with Mary in the presence of Gabriel, you are able to stand with the apostles before the Risen Lord, and hear the words said to each of them; the words God speaks to all who fear him: "Fear Not." "Do not be afraid."

It is paradox. It is riddle. It is truth. Those who fear God need not fear God.

In the Narnia story, the children learn that Aslan is not a man, but a lion.

"Is he – quite safe?" Susan asks. "I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion!"

"That you will my dear," said Mrs. Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without his knees knocking, he's either braver than most or quite silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" Lucy asks.

To which Mr. Beaver responds: "Safe? Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe! But he's good! He's the King, I tell you!"

This is the God of Advent! This is the God of our hope! Hope that this life is not all there is. Hope that at the appointed time, all that is hurtful, all that is distressing and confusing and destructive will be taken up with all that is light and pure and fun and holy and made into something that only God can fashion. This is the God of Advent. Purple for bruises. Purple for royalty. Purple for hope.

This God whom we rightly fear, who in turn assures us to fear not; takes together all that has ever been, and is creating, even now, a joy we cannot even begin to imagine.

We stand this day with feet firmly planted in two worlds.

Welcome to Advent!

+amen.