

The 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent; Jess Lee

For the past few weeks, I've been meeting with some of you and we've been discussing the Book of Common Prayer, what's in it and how we may use it in our daily lives.

When discussing it, I was reminded of the Memorial Acclamation. The Memorial Acclamation is found in the middle of our celebration of Eucharist, just after the priest has said the words of consecration. And it goes...

*Christ has died.*

*Christ is risen.*

*Christ will come again.*

We know that Christ has died.

*And*

We know that Christ is risen.

*And*

We know that Christ will come again.

We repeat this every Sunday, every time we celebrate the Eucharist, and every time I hear these words, I am reminded by the strange task set before us as Christians, that is, to hold all three of these things, that sometimes seemingly contradict each other, in our little hands and believe them to be true.

And, it is a hard task at times, and yet, I find myself always drawn back to these central statements. During this season of advent, we traditionally focus on the statement that Christ will come again.

And for those of you who have listened to *Godspell*, the musical adaptation of the Gospel according to Matthew, we hear the same thing in the Finale, where the disciples of Jesus are singing with Jesus as he is dying.

They are crying out,

"Oh God, you're dead" Christ has died

and then

"Long live God" Christ has risen

and then

"Prepare ye, the way of the Lord" Christ will come again

Almost all on top of each other, echoing again that central task as Christians, to know that Christ has died, and that Christ is very much risen and alive, and that we are still preparing the way of the Lord.

And now, it is advent, a season typically known for preparation. We prepare our hearts, our minds, our churches for the coming of Jesus, both as an infant and at his second coming. We are in the *Christ will come again* portion of the lectionary year, the *Prepare ye, the way of the Lord* part of the Finale of *Godspell*.

And now, it is advent. And it is a pandemic still, and I do not want to prepare. I am tired, we are tired, the people of God are tired. I do not want to keep awake or keep watch or any of that. I would like to sleep.

And now, it is advent. I very much would like God to tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at God's presence, as the prophet Isaiah writes.

I would like if God did awesome deeds that we did not expect and I very much would like God to do something.

And yes, while advent is a season of preparation, of preparing the way of the Lord, of remembering that Christ will come again, the other two sentences of the Memorial Acclamation still hold true.

Christ has very much already died.

*and*

Christ is, and continues to be, very much risen.

God very much did do something, and continues to do something.

And none of our preparation or lack of preparation ultimately changes that.

If we light the advent wreath each night, Christ continues to be risen.

And if we never light it or pray at all this advent, Christ continues to be risen.

If we sell all of our possessions and give to the poor, Christ continues to be risen.

And if we don't sell all of our possessions and steal from the poor, Christ continues to be risen.

When I look at the Gospel passage, while it is filled with Jesus telling us to prepare, to keep watch, there are also words of comfort.

Heaven and earth will pass way, but my words will not pass away, He tells us.

While living in Tucson last year, I worshipped at a primarily Anglo-Catholic parish, which means a lot of things, but for the sake of this story, it means that we had a priest around who offered to say a mass out of the Anglican Missal one Friday morning. And we can get into a much longer discussion of what the Anglican Missal is during coffee hour, but in short, it is a the translation of the Latin Tridentine Missal into the English. And, since our house was mainly made up of incredibly earnest and nerdy church people who liked to say weird old liturgies, we said yes.

And while a lot of things occurred during that service that frankly confused me more than comforted me, but at the conclusion of the service, the Last Gospel is said, just after the priest blesses the people.

Now, the Last Gospel is the opening chapter of John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

No matter what else had occurred in that service, the ending brought me back to the core of Christianity, that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words may not.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Word will not.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

And amidst so much around us passing away, so much and so many around us dying, we can rest knowing that the Word that has died, has indeed risen, and will come again.