

LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O LORD, MY STRENGTH AND MY REDEEMER.

I have a story I want to share with you from an anonymous source.

A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know."

"You don't know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?"

The doctor was holding the handle of the door. On the other side came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness. Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing ... I know my Master is there and that is enough."

In the reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims that "there will be signs in the sun, the moon and stars and on earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." Modern day alarmist would equate this with the notion that the sky is falling. And every generation has a soothsayer who believes that the end-times is near.

Sam Cooke describes the lesson today best in his lyrics to his 1963 record "A Change Gonna Come":

*There's been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will.*

My friends, change is gonna come. The sky is not falling. There is "distress among the nations" and within our country; but that, unfortunately, has always been the case. As long as there are imperfect people governing nations, there will be trouble and difficulty. But in the midst of that distress, there is and there will always be hope. The words of Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined....For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

He is here now, today and my friends He is coming not in distress but in hope. And that is so easy to forget. Even for me.

A story from my hospice experience. She was 45 years old but she looked much older. She had had a horrific life; there were very few positive moments to list. As a result of her spreading cancer, she was increasingly sick and symptomatic; but she was dealing with her condition

stoically and quietly. When she related her life story to me, I wept inside and as I prayed for her, I had a “doubt”. It was the darkness that is referred to in Isaiah; as I prayed, in another section of my brain, I asked God “Why?” “Why?” Why could you allow this to happen to her?”. For a moment, I forgot that God is in the darkness as in the light. I forgot that God is always in our midst but especially present in the storms and the shadow-times of our lives. And, most importantly, God is present in our doubts.

Even when we are at our “wits end”; when we feel that there are no answers to so many questions; yes, even when we have those moments of disbelief, doubting whether God is listening or even present or even cares; The Lord is present and listening and loves us.

Frederick Buechner describes these times this way (entitled Keeping Touch): “We believe in God – such as it is, we have faith – because certain things happened to us once and go on happening. We work and goof off, we love and dream, we have wonderful times and awful times, are cruelly hurt and hurt others cruelly, get mad and bored and scared stiff and ache with desire, do all such human things as these, and if our faith is not mainly just window dressing or a rabbit’s foot or fire insurance, it is because it grows out of precisely this kind of rich human compost. The God of biblical faith is the God who meets us at those moments in which for better or worse we are being most human, most ourselves, and if we lose touch with those moments, if we don’t stop from time to time to notice what is happening to us and around us and inside us, we run the tragic risk of losing touch with God too”.

We live in fear. Forest fires lighting the sky; shootings at schools and pubs and theaters; divisions in our country that seem to escalate daily; And, like my moment of doubt, we forget that in the midst of our feelings of helplessness and hopelessness and doubt, there is someone waiting patiently on the other side of the door. All we need to do is open it.

(Matthew 28:16 – 20) Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain, which Jesus appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted.....and lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The disciples doubted. But he told them to go out to all nations; and don’t worry...I will be with you where ever you go. My friends, we do not have to worry about what has happened; about today; or what may happen in the future. For the Son of Man is coming...with power and great glory. As we experience this Advent season, let us walk from the darkness towards the light of a new birth of peace and love, never forgetting that He is with us now and always has been and always will be regardless of our doubts, our disappointments, our heartaches.

In closing, I would like to share with you a poem by Joseph T. Nolan, entitled “The whole earth’s a waiting room”:

*We wait – all day long, for planes and buses, for dates and appointments,  
for five o’clock and Friday.  
Some of us wait for a Second Coming.  
For God in a whirlwind. Paratrooper Christ.  
All around us people are waiting: a child, for attention; a spouse, for conversation; a  
parent, for a letter or call.  
The prisoner waits for freedom;  
and the exile, to come home.  
The hungry, for food;  
and the lonely, for a friend.*

*The whole earth's a waiting room!*

*"The Savior will see you now" is what we expect to hear at the end.*

Maybe we should raise our expectations. The Savior might see us now if we know how to find him. Could it be that Jesus, too, is waiting for us to know he is around?"

This Advent, let us not be afraid to open the door and walk into the presence of the Son of Man.

AMEN