

We live in a world full of paradoxes. Now in case you have forgotten what a paradox is, the American College Dictionary defines it as: A statement or proposition seeming self-contradicting or absurd, and yet explicable as expressing the truth. For example, a paradox I puzzled over while growing up: The king is dead, long live the king! How can a dead king live a long life, I wondered. Then it finally dawned on me. The first part of the statement was a fact: the king has died. The second half was a prayer for the life of the new king. (Now none of you probably ever wondered over that statement!)

Another paradox speaks about our Advent faith: Christ has come, Christ is coming. They are both truthful statements. Advent is a time of preparation to celebrate the coming of the king and to wait in expectation for the coming of the king—the Joy of waiting.

Our Scripture text this morning gives us two views about the coming of Christ. The first is the view of the prophet Isaiah and is one seen in much of the Old Testament. *“O that you would come.”* They wanted God to come. It has been many years of silence and a “word” from the Lord had not been heard. Like Job they wanted to hear again from God. Remember Job’s lament? *“If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say”* (Job. 23:3-5). Job longed to find God. Job wanted a dialogue with God about his suffering. Job wanted to hear God’s side of the story – he would listen and then he would speak his piece about how he felt (he does rather well in his laments). What accusations does God have against me? There is no joy with Job in waiting for his encounter with God.

God comes. Job cannot answer. God gave Job what he longed for, prayed for – an audience with the Creator of all creation. Job’s wait was over and he was forever changed.

Isaiah longs for God to come again as God did at Sinai. The mountains to tremble, the earth to shake, God seen as an all consuming fire. He wants God to come again and judge the world and those whose lives are lived in opposition to the God of his faith. Bring judgment to your world. We wonder if he's not a bit like Jonah. Jonah did not really want Nineveh saved (Jonah 4:5). Oh yes, he brought God’s message to Nineveh – after some persuasion – but he was really hoping to see Nineveh destroyed. He would be one who went to hockey games to see the fights! Jonah believed it would reflect poorly on God should Nineveh be saved. After all they are Gentiles and sinners.

Judgment is fine as long as we stand without sin. Isaiah begins to reflect on his life and the life of the nation. He realizes that they too stand in need of God’s judgment. We have heard a lot these past few weeks of the vetting process of our president elect. He wants to make sure that there are no skeletons in the closet of those he chooses to run his administration. Of course, we all know that we all have skeletons in our closets. We all have things in our lives that we would prefer others not find out about. We want a judge to judge others but not us.

- Isaiah realizes his sins and the transgressions of the people of God. Or,
- *we too stand guilty before a sinless God
 - *we too stand in need of prayer
 - *we too stand in need of mercy and forgiveness

*we too are as those unclean

*we are clay in the potter's hand

On second thought God, why don't you count to 10 before you come.

As we move to Mark's Gospel we find Jesus talking about his second coming. Mark and the other Gospel writers paint a picture of God for us that shows a different side of God than they/we believed from Old Testament accounts. After all the prayers, all the ideas of how God would come – God comes as a babe in a manger in Bethlehem. God comes as one Incarnate, walking in our midst. God comes as a young rabbi from Nazareth. The mountains did not rend in to. The earth did not shake. God came and only a few shepherds on a hillside in Bethlehem heard the proclamation and the singing. The world was not expecting a God who would laugh and cry with creation. They were not expecting a God who would hold young children in his arms and bless them. They were not expecting a God who would welcome outsiders, Gentiles, into the family. They were not expecting a God who would die and rise again on the third day. They were not expecting a God who would make love of creation a mandate and priority of his kingdom. God came and no one was ready. It was not the God they were expecting.

Their prayers were answered but they did not recognize it. Phil Yancey in his book on Prayer shares some of the prayers God did not answer. He points out that God did not answer the prayers of Moses, Job, Jonah and Elijah to die. He notes that God did not answer the prayer of Jesus that the cup might pass from him. Are we not glad that God did not answer those prayers? Where would we be if the cup had passed from Jesus? Where would we be if God had answered the prayers of Isaiah to come in judgment? God's answers are worth waiting for.

The joy of waiting is bound up in God's surprises. Can you imagine the conversations of Mary and Joseph as they wonder what God will be like? The days of planning and preparation for the birth of one "*who will save his people from their sins*" (Matt.1:21). How will this be accomplished? As Mary holds the babe in her arms for the first time she cannot imagine the shadow of the cross over the young child. The first cries of the child in her arms are the sounds of new hope for the world. Christ has come; God is with us, Immanuel.

Christ is coming. Only this time not as a babe in a manger but as the judge of Isaiah's prayers. This time Christ is coming with all the glory of the heavens behind him. As they could not comprehend his first coming, neither can we comprehend his second. There are those who would paint pictures for us of what this will be like. But God is and has been a God of surprises and the pictures we once painted were wrong. We usually are. God is still a God of surprises.

The anthem this morning, "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard the things God has prepared for those who love him" speaks of a God of surprises – The joy of waiting is that our God is a God who surprises at every turn. We wait again for the coming of the Christ. We wait for an event that we cannot comprehend. We wait with joyous expectation that God will continue to surprise us—We again this Advent celebrate the paradox of our faith, the joy of waiting:

Christ has come, Christ is coming!

Yancey, Phillip, Prayer, Zondervan, 2006 (pp 232-233)