

Prepare the Way of the Lord! 2 Advent B

The second Sunday of Advent contrasts the Lord's coming with what typically lasts forever -- mountains, valleys, rough places and uneven places. God's coming gives us an altered perspective on these places – they may last forever, but they do change. Likewise nothing from a human perspective is forever.

The prophet Isaiah continues to hammer away at the human perspective by attacking the impermanence of life. He compares human life to that of grass and of a flower that fades and dies. The prophet compares our fading life to the lasting word of God that endures forever. Then he suddenly shifts to good news. "Your God is here!"

As if to show that even spiritual landscapes can change, Isaiah the prophet springs on to a hopeful note. Just as God's word endures forever, the prophet seems to say, "So does his love." God is described as generous, caring and gentle. Finally, Isaiah gives us some hope that God's presence will make the uncertainty of life on earth have meaning. No longer does he compare God's people to grass. Now they are the sheep of His pasture that will be led to good grazing. Their time of uncertainty and rebellion is over. Peace at last reigns.

But peace has a price. People in the Bible couldn't understand when they had hardships and trials....after all THEY ARE GOD'S PEOPLE and no harm would come to them!! But time and again, if they did not act *like God's people*...not obeying His Word, they would suffer the consequences. In 587 AD the Babylonian army defeated Israel. Human perspectives and actions must change before people can truly hear and understand what God is saying.

The psalmist writes, "I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, for He is speaking peace to His faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to Him." Psalm 85:8.

How well do I listen to what God is saying when I turn my heart to Him? I take for granted that turning my heart to God is enough. Do I need to listen too? Granted, each of us has a unique ability to tune in to the frequencies that come from God's broadcast. The "bandwidth" God uses must be extraordinarily wide and I imagine is like one of those radio telescopes employing a huge dish to send and receive some signal to/from outer space. All possible frequencies are used to speak a language that will be understood by intelligent life and on every frequency across the human spectrum. Likewise, you and I are invited to turn our "receivers" to the voice of God. Those that have ears to hear Him, let them hear.

It might seem that the signal God sends is a long way off. Be assured He is broadcasting constantly. He is patiently waiting for us to change to the right station and suddenly... there is God! Just as Isaiah wrote. The letter of Peter reminds us, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" 2 Peter 3:9.

How might we get better at tuning into the right frequency?

The letter of Peter continues, “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness” 2 Peter 3:11.

There they are again...those pair of words that bring us closer to God and make us more like Him, able to hear and listen, focus and respond to His calling. I think of these two attributes, godliness and holiness, as particularly high frequencies that invite each Christian to step up to and hear.

A friend of mine is a Ham Radio enthusiast. Ted not only had a tower erected behind his house but he also rigged his car to receive and send signals. He likes talking to people from other countries. He did not spare the expense it took to have the right electronics and antennae. His ability to communicate is amazing. He has made many friends and has listened with great interest to a variety of discussions. It sounds like fun – but it’s not for me.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that every person with reverence of God can find a signal in which to connect to the vibrations God sends. That medium of communication will not be the same for everyone.

Not everyone could hear the words of John the Baptist sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus. The very religious had a tough time hearing John. So many others like John had come and gone. John’s message had substance and used water. His simple message captivated people’s interest. Water is a simple way to get people ready to receive a guest. We wash and clean everything to feel ready to invite a guest into our home. Water was also a symbol for the inward cleaning needed to be prepared to receive a holy message. John compared his message with the Messenger that would come to take his followers a step closer to meeting God in the flesh. John saw the day that his watery message would make people ready for the fire of the Holy Spirit poured into the lives of those ready to receive Jesus Christ.

In this season of Advent are we ready to receive Jesus Christ into our lives? He is coming.

This week, 20th Century Fox will release a remake of the 1951 sci-fi classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. You may have already seen the ads for it. The story is about a humanoid alien named Klaatu, who arrives on Earth accompanied by an indestructible, heavily armed robot named Gort. A couple of household names!

In the 1951 version of the story, Klaatu was a kind of Christ figure, arriving on earth with a message of peace, staying among the common people, dying at the hands of soldiers but later being resurrected. On Earth, Klaatu used the name “John Carpenter,” reminiscent perhaps of Jesus as the carpenter’s son (also coincidentally the initials JC). It’s expected that the new version of the movie will essentially follow that same story line. In fact, the director, Scott Derrickson, is a professing Christian.

Mr. Derrickson was asked, “Why would a Christian get involved in horror films, of all things?” This was his reply:

“In my opinion, the horror genre is a perfect (one) for Christians to be involved with. I think the more compelling question is, ‘Why do so many Christians find it odd that a Christian would be working in this genre? To me, this genre deals more overtly with the supernatural than any other, it tackles issues of good and evil more than any other genre, it distinguishes and articulates the essence of good and evil better than any other genre, and my feeling is, that a lot of Christians are wary of this genre simply because it’s unpleasant. The genre is not about making you feel good; it is about making you face your fears. And in my experience, that’s something that a lot of Christians don’t want to do.”

These Advent prophets, old and modern, invite Christians to be prepared for the Lord’s coming. To face among other things, their fears; to clean up! To change the things they can change! To be at peace with one’s self! We can’t go wrong with these instructions. But what will we do with them now?

Prepare ye the way of the Lord! God’s coming is our opportunity to receive Him. He announces his arrival on all frequencies. He is a God that is gentle, caring and leading the people like sheep of a flock. His power to forgive is abundant. His mercy is everlasting. His love endures forever despite the changes and chances of this life. This God is one to whom you and I can safely surrender our will and our lives, by obeying His Word. Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Amen.