

Let us go to the mountain of the Lord, says Isaiah, that we may walk in his paths.

I have a friend who lived in Texas. Each summer he and his wife and a few other parents drove a youth group across the Texas panhandle, then the flat lands of Colorado to the Rocky Mts. They prepared for the trip all winter. In July they set forth in a caravan of cars. He described the drive: 800 miles in a straight line across prairie and desert. Then, when travel numbness was setting in, they had a glimpse of what *might be* a distant mountain, or maybe it would turn out to be a bank of clouds. Everyone leaned forward to see if it was real and solid, or air and vapor. After a few false alarms, the shoulders and peaks of new terrain came into view. Then, it was as if the mountains themselves were coming forward- a new, enveloping landscape approaching. Soon it was time to make camp.

What we are approaching in Advent is already approaching us. Who we are looking for is already coming, inviting us. We don't have to drive 800 miles. We can stay right here and Christmas will come. We may too busy or numb to notice. We may want to curl up in the back seat and go to sleep but the future in Christ is coming - in ways we may have glimpsed before but have yet to fully appreciate. As the wonderful Xmas carol says "Where meek hearts will receive him, *still* the dear Christ enters in." What's most wonderful is not only that God once created the world, but is still creating the world in ways we have only glimpsed. St. Paul, many years after the birth of Jesus, says "You know what time it is...now is the moment; lay aside the works of darkness."

I arrived this far last night in preparing the sermon, then didn't know what to say. I had thought I could speak about Advent being like setting up camp in the wilderness- returning to the basics and simple things. But then it began to sound more like a cowboy movie, and old western in which the Lone Ranger or Ronald Reagan rides into town to clean up the bad actors. What we have in the gospel is an *apocalypse*- Noah's Flood. All are swept away while eating and drinking, except the few who are on alert: Keep awake, you do not know what time the Lord is coming. And he's going to come like a thief, breaking into the house you now hold. Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Is this good news? Are we glad that God comes not only once, but is still creating the world? That Christ is coming afresh?

Apocalypse- which means literally uncovering, or *revealing*- has two strands in the Bible. Both have to do with the revealing and uncovering of God. One strand has the Son of David, Son of God, the Christ coming as conqueror, overthrowing the enemy by military might and superior force- Almighty God who banishes evil through Christ His Son our Lord. This is actually the lesser strand in the Bible. It's there; it's here in our world. It's like an eternal football game. But it doesn't endure. It doesn't grow. The dominant strand, the way the resurrected Christ emerged and the church grew in the Roman empire and grows today is feeding the hungry, healing the wounded, welcoming the stranger to dinner, going to the disciples behind their doors closed in fear, so doubting Thomas could reach out, and say OMG you are here. I can follow and open the door.

This Advent especially seems much in apocalypse. Old institutions are crumbling. We have an outsider- to politics, to the military, to paying taxes- coming in as President. We don't know what's going to happen; and it is frightening. Apocalypse- the upending of what we know- is frightening- Our call is to follow the dominant strand of our forebears- to feed, heal, care, and welcome. To come together to pray and support each other. Such actions have been dominant in history, rising up through empires that come and go. Our call is to follow, to stay alert and trust, that the pain and upheaval we experience is the pain of pregnancy, of God's coming more fully. Follow in faith, stand for what is right, and let God take care of the rest

OK. It's like setting up camp in the wilderness; but more is going on than we know. In Advent, we're around the fire, checking on each other, resisting the wild beasts, preparing for a new dawn.