

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, November 29, 2009

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### **“Come thou long-expected Jesus”**

*This discussion is the opinion of Bert Cobb and is not necessarily the opinion of anyone else. Do not interpret these reflections to mean anything other than what Bert Cobb thinks and feels. They are for the exhortation, encouragement, and edification of the Saints and may be used freely for that purpose.*

The Lectionary Readings for the week:

[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

[Psalm 25:1-9](#)

[1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#)

[Luke 21:25-36](#)

I was not raised in a “church” tradition that celebrated “The Advent Season” so I have no prejudices either for or against its observance. Each “church” year, the Lectionary Series begins and ends with Advent. This year marks my ninth year of writing these discussions. Each Sunday, we gather to think about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in “remembrance” of his sacrifice of love for each of us. Let us keep in mind that the birth of Jesus was the opening of a “door” between God and Mankind. Christ’s birth truly CHANGED the world. The baby, Jesus, was “Emanuel”, God WITH US. “God CAME DOWN” is the common phrase used to describe this event in history. The “baby” Jesus was the fulfillment of a PROMISE made by God, the Gift of Messiah to offer salvation to those who would accept the grace of God delivered in a small “package”. One might say that the events of Easter are the obvious result of the Christmas Story, the culmination of a “life of PURPOSE”. The birth led to the crucifixion as Jesus became “perfect(ed)” in the sense that he “fulfilled the purpose for which He was born”. Jesus came to SHOW us how to live. Wouldn’t it be “nice” if each of us could lead lives of “purpose” that fulfill our destinies in a way “pleasing to God” after the manner of the Christ Child? Our God is the “God of new beginnings” most vividly represented by the coming of “Baby Jesus”, the “gift that keeps on giving”. Let us have a happy Advent and a time of reflection to ascertain our “place in the Kingdom”. Are we fulfilling our “purpose” in our lives? If not, Advent is a propitious time to “start over” by “renewing our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Let us “put on Christ” by celebrating His life through committing our lives to HIM. “For, God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son...” to come down to bless us and give us HOPE and LIVES of PURPOSE.

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

***The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."***

Jeremiah foretold that a “righteous branch” would spring up for David. We must assume that he was alluding to the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the PROMISE that God made with “his people”. Only AFTER a prophecy is fulfilled do we fully understand the prophecy. Since the lineage of Jesus WAS from the descendents of King David, he was of the proper “bloodlines” to be the “child of PROMISE”. The astrologers (magi) understood that a “king” had been born and spent two years of arduous journey to worship Jesus and present their gifts. No, the “wise men” were NOT at the manger when Jesus was born despite the crèche scenes to which we have become accustomed. What else have we conjured up about the birth of Jesus? What if Jesus had been “borned” in Texas? Would we have recognized Him as the “promised Deliverer”? Jesus spent most of his life trying to convince the Jews that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah and Jeremiah. How well do you think the people who HEARD this prophecy understood the timing, the circumstances and the ONE who would come? Did they expect Jesus to be a general, a warrior or a “King”? Did they expect him to “arrive” fully grown and ready to fight the Romans? Don’t you just know that they NEVER expected their “Savior”, the “righteous Branch from David’s line”, to be born to a poor teen-ager in such lowly circumstances. Even today, Jesus seldom appears when or how we expect Him. Why do we sing “Come thou LONG-EXPECTED Jesus” and then, miss His coming? Do we expect the “King” to come at our beck and call or when “everything is perfect”? Is Jesus the “Savior” that we “expect”? Don’t get too “tied up” in the cacophonous scene of the nativity and MISS the Child, the miracle, the Savior. The nativity scene was a smelly place, a place of poverty AND a place of blessing. Here is the message: Where God IS, whether a Newborn King or an adult itinerant preacher, there is peace, love and salvation. Do you think that Joseph and Mary actually looked at Jesus any differently than you and I, as parents, see the birth of OUR children? A “first childbirth” is fraught with dangers. What if something “goes wrong”? We feel anxious when we don’t have an obstetrician AND a neo-natal intensive care unit nearby at the birth of our children. Again, focus on the child, the Savior, the miracle of God’s coming down to LIVE AMONG US. IF Jesus was born “perfect”, why was he circumcised? Why did Joseph “redeem” him from God at the temple? Did his “poop” stink? The very fact of the “humanity” of Jesus gives me great HOPE and JOY because Jesus truly KNOWS how you and I feel. He knows about “family problems”, poverty, the death of a friend and companion, religious tumult and hard work because He experienced them all in his brief lifetime. IF He could live “like us” and still maintain His relationship with the Creator, then, there is HOPE of salvation for YOU and ME. Don’t worry so much about “getting Christ back into Christmas”. What I should be concerned with is “getting Christ back into ME.” If I can allow Christ to be “born anew” in ME, then, for me, the Lord has returned in glory and my Christmas is complete. ***“Come thou long-expected Jesus...”***

## **Psalm 25:1-9**

1

**To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;**  
**my God, I put my trust in you; \***  
**let me not be humiliated,**  
**nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

2

**Let none who look to you be put to shame; \***  
**let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.**

3

**Show me your ways, O LORD, \***  
**and teach me your paths.**

4

**Lead me in your truth and teach me, \***  
**for you are the God of my salvation;**  
**in you have I trusted all the day long.**

5

**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, \***  
**for they are from everlasting.**

6

**Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; \***  
**remember me according to your love**  
**and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.**

7

**Gracious and upright is the LORD; \***  
**therefore he teaches sinners in his way.**

8

**He guides the humble in doing right \***  
**and teaches his way to the lowly.**

9

**All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness \***  
**to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

For what is the psalmist really pleading? This psalm says “Get ‘em, God”. Have you and I ever felt like “Get ‘em, God”? He also pleads for God to “forget” the sins of his youth. I can certainly identify with that plea! Many of us can find ourselves in this psalm. This psalm ascribes to God the love and faithfulness we expect from “keeping His covenant and his testimonies”. What changed with the coming of Jesus? Do we rely on “keeping the commandments” as our means of salvation? Jesus came to “pay it all” so that we can live in PEACE with God and ourselves because his blood covers us so that, when God looks at us, He sees Jesus who he loves and who paid the price for my sin. This psalm looks expectantly for the coming of Messiah, the Deliverer, and the “Savior of His people”. The coming of the Christ Child fulfills these, our most basic needs:

hope, freedom, peace and love. ***“Come thou long-expected Jesus, come to set your people FREE.”***

### **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

***How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.***

***Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.***

Wow! Paul uses very loving language to express his affection and care for the church at Thessalonica. I could use some of that “see you face to face and RESTORE whatever is LACKING in your FAITH.” Friends have the uncanny ability to RESTORE our faith IF they are faithful (full of faith) people. We are judged by the character and judgment of those with whom we associate in life. We must be very careful with whom we become intimate. How many friends do you really have in your life? Women tag along with each other to use the restroom. Men NEVER do this. Why? I think it is because women possess that Godly character of being open to other people by being vulnerable. Intimacy is a gift that we give ourselves. This letter to a church is very intimate and very open to a relationship built on a mutual respect and love for God. No friends should be closer than “church friends” because we share a love of God that cements us through the storms of life. When I look on the faces of MY friends, I see the face of God reflected in their friendship. Paul obviously LOVES these people and wants only the best for them. Friends earnestly PRAY for their friends. Friends pray for those they love. Why did Jesus ask us to “pray for our enemies”? It is almost an impossibility to pray earnestly for someone we don’t love. It’s that Agape thing versus that Amore thing. I must confess that I have a hard time praying for people who say hateful words about me and do hateful things to me. I also find that praying for these people allows me to “see their side of the argument” through God’s eyes and to change MY ATTITUDE about them. IF God loves my enemy no less or more than me, I’m really praying for a blessing FOR ME when I pray for them. How can I learn to “pray for my enemies”? Where God is, there is peace. ***“Come thou long-expected Jesus, Come to set your people free.”***

### **Luke 21:25-36**

***Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now***

*when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

*Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

*"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Why would the collators of the Lectionary include this passage for this Sunday when Advent begins? These words and verses are about and by the "adult Jesus", aren't they? Is it to show that the continuum of peace and "expectation" is a thread that runs all through the tapestry of scripture? Two weeks in a row, the passages have spoken about the "warning signs" of the "Second Coming". Are we to take these "signs" literally? Almost every week, the news contains items that could be translated as "signs of the Apocalypse" couldn't they? Is this supposed to make me anxious or fearful? Why should the "end of the world" upset me so? Do I really believe, along with Paul, that, **"To live is Christ, to DIE is GAIN"**? Living life in fear of dying is not living at all. We take life for granted until we hear that we "only have six weeks to live". Should we see the "end" of this life as only the "beginning" of a better life? Is this passage about the "Rapture"? How can we "prepare" for an event about which we know so little? Jesus tells to always be "prepared" so it will not matter WHEN he returns. To the Christian who has a "relationship" with God through Christ, the "Second Coming" will be a welcomed event like the return of an old friend. What does this have to do with the "new-born King"? The coming of the "King" to live among us was only the beginning of our living in the "presence of God". All of humanity will "die" at some time. We must come to the point where we eagerly look forward to the "return of the King". Just be sure that Jesus is "King" of our lives and we need not fear any of the "signs" that Jesus foretold. "Advent" means "coming". We must not be anxious about Christmas. We CELEBRATE JESUS every Sunday. Thank God we have the Advent Season to prayerfully examine OUR NEED for a re-birth of the Spirit of God in US. Do we fully understand what the "coming" of Christ should mean? Unless we understand the "first coming", we have little hope of understanding the "Second Coming". The "first coming" was to prepare us for the "Second Coming". We must "do the work" of preparing the Way of the Lord to enter our hearts and lives. Let us eagerly sing **"Come thou long-expected Jesus, come to SET YOUR PEOPLE FREE'**. Are we "free"? Do we live like we are "free"? This Christmas, when we sing "Come thou long-expected Jesus", let us truly be grateful and longing for the "Day of the Lord" as

the “newborn King” is reborn in US. ***“Prepare ye the way of the LORD.”*** Oh, glorious morning... ***“Come thou long-expected Jesus, come to set your people FREE.”*** Sing it loudly, even if you sing off-key. Sing it with expectation. Sing it with true JOY in our hearts as we might welcome a long-lost FRIEND. Have a joyous Advent full of HOPE and do the “work” of preparation. Advent IS HERE. Christ is “coming”. Are we “ready”?