

**Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36**  
**First Sunday of Advent B; 12.01.24; G. Miles Smith+**

The First Sunday of Advent is notable for compelling us, every year, to think about something which we might not especially want to think about...well...*depending on what your experience of Christianity has been*. And that something is the *Second Coming of Christ*. I don't have any memory of this subject, when I was growing up in church, until my best friend in high school became involved in a church which made this idea a major focus of their teaching. And then he began to show me charts of how it was all supposed to happen...in different historical phases...when Jesus would come again.

I was fairly mystified by it then because I had no frame of reference to be able to judge the complicated references to Bible passages and historical events...nor was I able to understand the fervor with which my friend embraced these teachings about the Second Coming of Christ. From his point of view, it seemed like everything else about Christianity...and life...paled in comparison...to that one future event. I eventually had to just set it all aside because I did not know what to do with it. And then, years later, in seminary, it was helpful to learn that one reason the Second Coming of Christ is so complicated to talk about...is because of the Bible *itself*. The Bible talks about the subject in many different ways—and Jesus did too.

And the subject just does not go away—it returns every First Sunday of Advent and more. In fact, the Christian teaching of the *Second Coming of Christ* is actually named in our worship services *every* Sunday...perhaps without our noticing it. So, while it is far from being the only thing Christians should focus on, it is definitely a continuing part of Christian teaching. And, we really need to do better in our Christian understanding of this than the humorous bumper sticker we've all probably seen sometime which says: "Jesus is coming—Everybody look busy!"

Even before we get to the New Testament which speaks frequently of the Second Coming of Christ, the Old Testament speaks confidently that the reason *we have a path of righteousness and mercy to follow in our lives*...is because *God is making a path of righteousness and mercy* through time.

*"Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths." (Psalm 25:3)*

We must take history...and our own personal histories seriously...because God takes it all seriously. The consistent witness in the Bible is that God *is* involved...and *is* making a path...in both time and eternity...towards a destination...where righteousness and mercy finally triumph. And the path that God has taken...and is still taking...is Jesus.

It has long been inconceivable to the Church...that the world having first encountered God in Christ...should not do so yet again. And it has been impossible, despite all the obstacles and unknowns, for the Church to let go of that desire...that belief...and hope—even when we as individuals often do.

Clearly, the future of God in Christ won't come on *our* terms...but on *God's*. And, clearly, God's future will continue to be *resisted* as much as it is *desired*. But the future does not ultimately depend on us...but on God.

That's really good news...especially in those times when it is obvious just how much we cannot fix our own lives and the world...or when we have somehow managed to convince ourselves...that we must. The kingdom that is coming is not our own. The One who is coming is someone we have already met.

We really do need to pray... just as Jesus taught us to pray...for God's kingdom to come...God's will be done...on earth as in heaven.

Come, Lord Jesus.