

OPENING:

An expression that I really like is when someone asks you whether you are going to do something, and one replies:

“Yes... God willing and if the creek don’t rise.”¹

The meaning of that expression, in insurance or liability terms, is that, barring an Act of God or a work of nature, is that you plan on doing it.

The meaning of that expression, theologically or in light of our Gospel reading, IS: that one recognizes that we are living in God’s time, that God’s will is paramount, that one tries to live with a spirit of waiting and fear and hopefulness, that there is something more to this this life than our human chronology.

EXAMPLES:

Let me give a couple of examples.

→ First, there was once a particularly pious church congregation whose church bulletin reflected their piousness. In their bulletin, where they listed the various events going on in the life of the church, next to each event were the letters “DV” which the congregation readily meant to stand for the Latin *DEO VOLENTE* → “God Willing.” Therefore, next to every upcoming bake sale, AA meeting, and Youth Group function were the letters “DV.”

Here was a congregation that had taken our Gospel reading seriously, that were highly attuned to the season of Advent. They were waiting, prepared for everything, unwilling to forecast anything as 100%.

That expression, “God Willing”, does make an appearance in *our* bulletin, by the way, in the section devoted to my ordination: “God Willing and the Bishop and the People consenting”—it reads. That certainly makes it sound official! And those of us to be ordained were instructed by the higher-ups to include such language in our invitations and Facebook announcements.

¹ James 4.13-15.

“God Willing” is a recognition that the event is not the work of the institutional church or the innumerable committees or the individual. But..... you could say the same thing about every bake sale/ AA Meeting, or Youth Group function. “God willing and the creek don’t rise” They will meet.

→ A second example, this one occurs during colonial times in American history. One year in a New England town, there was a total eclipse of the sun that cast a sudden and surprising darkness over the people in the area, including that state’s legislature who were meeting when it happened. With no electricity, shadows crept over the townhall and business became impossible to conduct. A general panic started such that people were worried that this Eclipse, indeed, was the End of Times.

A motion was made then to adjourn, until one of the legislators stood up and said that they should keep going, “Mr. Speaker” this legislator said, “if it is *not* the end of the world and we adjourn, we shall appear to be fools, If it *is* the end of the world, I choose to be found doing my duty.

I move you, sir, let candles be brought.”²

WAITING:

“Let the candles be brought.”

What a great message for this Advent season.

We light candles to spread light into the darkness because we don’t know when things are going to happen in the future, either the everyday moments of our lives, or the larger, more cataclysmic and “important” events that will happen. This includes the 2nd Coming or the End of Times.

We simply don’t know.

As an aside, we *do* know that whenever groups, especially no small share of Christian sects, have to tried to interpret and predict the End of Times, that they have all been spectacularly wrong, despite some serious and earnest effort on their part.

² Joanna M. Adams, “Light the Candles” *Christian Century* (November 28, 2006) 18.

Still, the timelines are never as clear as we want them to be. Luke's perspective seems to be that Jesus was neither escaping into the past, nor dreaming into the future. The point of this difficult and troublesome language then is a call to wake up, to live fully into *this* life, while recognizing the life outside of it.

That's a difficult task so in this "meantime", we wait and we listen and we remember, (and because we are human we forget), that we are living in God's time. We need this Gospel lesson as a reminder that we are waiting, that redemption is inexorably drawing near. Again, it's a call to live a life acknowledging that there is a larger story and narrative going on, but at the same time that *this* life is important.

MODELS:

As we wait, there comes the sense that we are challenged in Advent to think about how one's posture of waiting is important.

What should our waiting look like?

We have some models in this Advent season, classic ones that always bear reexamination, Mary of Nazareth and John the Baptist, that we will be hearing about in the next few weeks.

It would probably serve us all well to prayerfully inhabit their worldview, their headspace during this season of waiting.

Another model is the calendar of the church year itself. With the Advent Season, we have begun a new year. The old year is gone, the new year is beginning. We are called to thus pay attention to the holy during this time, in the same way that we might be more inclined to do so at a funeral of a loved one, or the birth of a baby.

Another model might indeed be children waiting for Christmas, that beautiful sense that all of us, regardless of age, can recall. During that time, there is something in your stomach that is in eager anticipation of something wonderful and amazing. Presents and gifts, yes. But even at that young age, it morphs into something more profound, something about the anticipation, something deep and beautiful about the preparation itself, that far outweighs what will be under the

Christmas tree. I believe that children and adults alike have some sense that, during this time, the world is alive with God's love and the realization that there is something special and holy going on all around us.

CLOSING:

Frederick Buechner writes about how waiting, if we take Jesus' words seriously, is the "realest, truest, most authentic thing we can do as Christians is to wait—to wait with passion, to wait with hope against hope for these mysterious words of Jesus (from our Gospel) to be fulfilled."

But Buechner also recognizes that there is also always darkness at this time, that it's creeping in, even as we wait in hope and prayer and repentance. That sense of "God willing" is always frighteningly realistic. The pain that we feel, collectively and as individuals, is real. Hallmark and the ritual of the season won't make it go away, nor can sometimes even the most holy posture of waiting.

Buechner therefore writes that in this time, this time between the 1st and the 2nd Comings, "There has never been Christ enough." Not back then, not now, and not next year. "And yet at some unknowable point in the future, there will be Christ enough. That is what Jesus is saying... That is our wild and beautiful hope. (And) In the meantime, if there is not Christ enough to save the day, there is Christ enough at least to make it bearable."³

Thus, during this Advent season, we wait in the knowledge that Christ is coming nearer and nearer in this world, we looking with new eyes that are wide open for glimpses of God's love breaking into this world, and "God willing and the creek don't rise" we rest in the firm hope that, in the fulness of time, salvation is drawing close.

AMEN

³ Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark*, 284.