1 Advent C 2024

 All the people lived on the plains. They were like people everywhere, some bad and some good. A man named John lived in the valley. He was a faithful Christian and participated in the works of mercy, helping the poor and needy, especially lepers living on the slope. But, in the valley itself there was discord; thieves and tricksters walked about openly. There was fighting, hatred and lying. Finally, John decided to move, saying to himself, *“God isn’t here. God is the Unsurpassed Great Spirit who doesn’t like fighting and discord. He wants peace and harmonious relationships in His human family.”*

 John saw a mountain in the distance and thought, “Ah, God our Great Ancestor must live up there in the quiet and peace. I will go up and find God.

 It took a long time, days and days, until he reached the mountain, and then he undertook the arduous climb in the burning equatorial sun. late one day, he rested by the side of the footpath. He was startled to see a bearded stranger with a staff making his way down the mountain. They greeted each another, *“What’s the news.”*

 John told him he was on his way up the mountain to see God the Creator and Source. The traveler said he was on his way down the mountain to live with all the people below. They talked as was the custom, and parted with the greeting, *“Goodbye, until we meet again.”*

 As he continued his climb, John thought of the man and admired him. He spoke well. John wondered why he was going down to the valley.

 As John climbed the air became thin and he moved more slowly. It was quiet and still, with the only sound coming from the birds. He thought, *“Ah, now I will find God here.”* He looked around but there was no one there. Then he cried out, *“Is God home? Where is God?”*

 Suddenly a gaunt old man appeared and greeting John. *“Welcome. Rest awhile after your journey, and climb.”*

John told him of the journey, and how he sought the All Peaceful One. Then old man listened and then answered. *“I’m sorry, but God doesn’t live here. I live alone. But, surely, you met God on the path. He was going down to live with the people there.”*

John was astonished*. “Are you sure? I thought He’d be up here. Why would He want to live down there among the fighting, jealousies, and anger of the people?”*

The old man answered, *“God knows the weakness of His people. There is an African fable about a hunter who was angry with God. He shot an arrow into the clouds. Si God withdrew into the high heavens to get away from the angry human beings. But God the Great Elder loved His human family and wanted to give them tender care.*

*“So, God our Great Ancestor sent His Son to pitch His tent among us, to live with us, to share our joys and sorrows, successes and failures, in order to save us. This is Christmas.”*

John was moved and listened to the old wise man speak. *“This Jesus, Emmanuel, is a mystery who prefers the company of nthe poor, the lowly, the simple, and the needy.”*

John knew he had learned the wisdom of the mountaintop. But now it was time to go down to the valley where God was. He told the old one, *“I need to live with the people as God lives.”*

The old one reached out and touched John’s head, turned around slowly, and the valley stretched out before him. He began to climb down. Now he knew where to find God.

(Adapted from *“The Man Who Couldn’t Find God,”* in What Language Does God Speak? African Stories about Christmas and Easter, Joseph G Healy, MM, ed. St Paul Publications, 1989)

God came down. This is the heart of the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. God prefers to live with us in spite of our sinful ways, our anger and violence, our lack of love for one another. We find God here on earth.

*“O gates, lift high your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let Him enter, the King of glory”* (Psalm 24.7). This Hebrew announcement invites us into the season of Advent, the season of comings, of anticipation. Many comings: of Christ in glory at the end of time; of God as human in the birth of Jesus-Emmanuel; of the word made flesh entering our hearts; and of peace with justice on earth. Together with the season of Christmas, the celebration of the coming of God among us as a human being in the mystery of the Incarnation, Advent reminds us of the coming of God as King of glory and Judge of the Universe.

The Scriptures for these seasons are rich and layered. They compress past, present, and future into the single moment of now! Now decides what comes first. The first Advent was Incarnation, Christmas, and Epiphany. The second Advent will be the coming of Christ in glory to inaugurate the Kingdom brought to earth in the person of Jesus—simply the longing and waiting of the church for the return of the Lord Jesus, the King of glory.

We live between the two advents. They are our meaning and source, our horizon and shadow. The first advent turns our eyes and hearts toward the mystery of God’s presence among us. As the story above reminds us, the first advent turns us toward the valley, the vale of tears where people dwell in joy and tears, in mildness and violence, in justice and injustice. This is where we find God.

The second advent commands us to turn our eyes and hearts toward the Word of God that reveals the mystery of God’s plan for the world, its freedom and liberation, its transformation and its holiness, as it was meant to be from the beginning.

We celebrate God being here, God who has come, and God who will return. God does return when we let God is—into our political and economic systems, our relationships, and all the places that are in sore need of redemption. The child-king reigns within Mary’s womb. The child and the woman are both in the womb of God’s world, the universe, that was fashioned to be a blessing and a dwelling place secure for all men and women. This is God in lowliness. Then, it will be God in glory.