

Advent I

Monday Psalm 44: 23-26

Does God Need To Be Stirred?

The Collect for the First Sunday in Advent begins, "Stir up, we implore you, your power." Does God need to be woken up? Is God lazy and slow like boys and girls are at doing their chores sometimes? It seemed that way to the writer of Psalm 44, did not it? He prayed, "Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself!"

And it can seem that way to us too. Our heavenly Father can seem like our earthly father on the couch for his Sunday afternoon nap. Nothing seems to rouse him. Nothing seems to stir him. "Wake up Daddy! I need you. I want you. Do not you care?"

But, of course, our earthly father does care. Much more so our heavenly Father. While it is true that our sinful earthly father may indeed be ignoring us that can never be true of our heavenly Father. That is why the Psalm writer ends with, "Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love."

That is the mood we enter the season of Advent with. We are preparing to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We are preparing to meet Him when He comes again for us in glory. We are preparing to meet Him as He comes in Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion. But because of our sins, our God seems far off, away from us, not concerned with us. We know He has a right to be. We know that because of our sins our heavenly Father should be fed up with us. We have deep feeling that our God should go on sleeping ignoring us in our sins.

But in the Church we do not pray based on our feelings; we pray based on what God tells us. He has told us that His love for us is "unfailing." Even when He seems asleep, it is not because His love has failed. Moreover, He wants us to "wake" Him up. He wants us to call on Him. He has said, "Keep on asking; keep on seeking; keep on knocking, and I will answer, be found, and open." You know how it is when you are sick. Your mom or dad say, "Honey, if you need me during the night just call." Sick with sin we begin the Church Year calling for our Father as He told us to do it.

Prayer: Stir up, we implore You, Your power, O Lord, and come that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Tuesday Exodus 14: 19-20

A Protecting Power

We pray in the Collect this week for our Lord to stir up His power for our protection. Being protected is a good, comforting thing, but power is often frightening. Think of electricity. There is a lot of power, but what type of sign do you often see around electrical panels and rooms? "DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE." That gives me the impression that if I get too close to that power it will zap me. God's power can be frightening. In the empty Easter tomb, the women saw powerful angels. They were so bright they could not bear to look at them. Ezekiel and Daniel come face to face with powerful angels and fall flat on their faces.

But power can be very comforting, cannot it? If you saw the "Jurassic Park" movies, you saw that huge, fierce dinosaurs were kept behind invisible fences of electric power. The electric power kept the people in the park safe from the dinosaurs. That power was comforting to them. This is how it is with God's power.

When God's Church in the Old Testament left Egypt, the Angel of God stationed Himself between them and the Egyptians who wanted to hurt them. But God wrapped Himself in a cloud so that His awesome power would not scare His people.

In Advent we remember that God wrapped His power in flesh and blood. Nobody can see God in all of His power. Nobody can touch God in all of His power. But in Jesus, Mother Mary could hold God. In Jesus, the shepherds could touch God. In Jesus, God is our protecting Power. Jesus put Himself between us and God's wrath. On Jesus fell all the judgment, all the punishment that you and I deserve for our sins. Protected by the power of Jesus we can live safely with God.

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Thursday Leviticus 14: 53-57

Unseen Danger

"Look both ways before crossing the street," parents constantly remind their children. If a car is coming, that is dangerous, and they are not to step into the street. But there are some dangers that cannot be seen.

You just heard some of the rules God gave His Church in the Old Testament. You heard about the rules for infectious disease, itches, mildew, and rashes. God did not give these rules to His Church to teach them about healthy living. No, they were to teach His people about sin. These rules showed them how sin was everywhere, how it was impossible to avoid it, how they must not try to deal with it themselves, how they must deal with it using the Church orders God had set up. While God has not given to His New Testament Church such rules about rashes and mildew, He still wants us to be aware that the primary danger we face is not from disease or disaster but from sin.

That is why we prayed this Sunday that "we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins." We may be physically healthy, always watching when we cross the street, and always wearing our seat belt, but still sin is dangerous. And just like God's Old Testament Church could not deal with all those skin diseases, so we cannot deal with our sins. It is not a matter of you trying to be a better boy or girl. That is not enough. Sin is not just what you do or do not do. Sin is the condition you are in. It is not just that your hands or face are dirty. It is that you are sunk in a mud puddle.

Only God can rescue us from "the threatening perils of our sins." That is why we pray to Him to do it. We cannot get clean by washing here or there. We cannot get ourselves out of the mud puddle. No, God must come and wash us. God must come and rescue us. And He has. He became one of us to take the punishment we deserve for being in the mud puddle. More than that, He washed us completely clean by our Baptismal Waters.

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Friday 2 Corinthians 5: 15-19

Saved By the Bell

Have you ever been saved by the bell? The teacher is asking questions over the material she just taught. She has just asked you a question. You do not know the answer. You are stumbling, fumbling around for the answer. Just then the bell rings. Class is over. You have been saved by the bell. Of course, the bell did not save you, did it? The bell did not rush into class and say, "No, do not ask him anymore questions." The bell just rang, and in ringing let the teacher know the class was over. But we continue to use the saying, "saved by the bell."

In Church we use the saying "saved by faith." You can get the impression that your faith causes God to save you. That faith rushes in and says, "No, God this child believes, so you must forgive him or her." Well, when we say, "saved by faith," we do not mean our faith is what does the saving anymore than we mean the bell saves us when we say "saved by the bell."

What saves us is God's "mighty deliverance." What saves us is something God did not something we do or even believe. You heard that in the Bible reading, did not you? O, maybe you do not know what that big word "reconciled" means? It means "make friends." We read that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." How? "By not counting men's sins against them." Now if you are God's friend, then He certainly has saved you, hasn't He? But how did you become friends with God? By being good? By not doing as many sins as someone else? No, you became a friend of God because He counted your sins against Jesus instead of you.

You believe that. That is good. But your believing did not cause God to save you. Saving you was all His idea and His work. You are saved by His mighty deliverance. Saying we are saved by faith is a short way of saying we are saved by what Jesus does just like saying we are saved by the bell is a short way of saying we are saved by the teacher running out of time.

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Saturday Genesis 3:15

A "Mighty" Deliverance

Are you familiar with the Mighty Morphen Power Rangers? Are they strong! Are they powerful! Are they awesome! I have seen them take on monsters twice their size. I have seen them out numbered 5 to 1 and still win. Now that is might; that is power.

We pray in the Collect for our Lord to rescue us from our sins by His "mighty deliverance." But God did not come into the world as a powerful angel destroying His enemies. God did not come into the world with a loud bang. God did not come into the world with much visible power at all.

But He came as He told us He would. He told our first parents Adam and Eve that He would come as the Seed of the Woman that is without a human father. He told us He would be born of a Virgin. He told us He would come to suffer and die for sinners. Now none of that looks all that mighty. It looks like a Mighty Morphen Power Ranger could do much better. And that is why most people this time of year are getting ready to celebrate just Santa, just presents, just family getting together.

Santa does powerful things. Makes all the toys for the children of the world, flies in a sleigh, gets down chimneys, and hauls around all those presents. That seems mighty. Santa works with power and might. The power and might of our God is weakness.

It is hard to understand. Nobody can. But our God came into the world covering up His power, so that He might live in a humble way on the earth. He came and did not use the power and might He had so that He might take our place under the Law and die in our place under its punishments. He came in weakness because that was the only way to deliver us.

But that deliverance is "mighty." Jesus rescued us so thoroughly that not sin, not death, not even the devil can touch us. All the Power Rangers in the world could not defeat sin, death, and the devil, but our Jesus in the manger did.

Prayer: Stir up, we implore You, Your power, O Lord, and come that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen