

December 4, 2005
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Reflection #1
Isaiah 40:1-11

“God comes with might, like a shepherd”

*All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,... surely the people is grass.*

Did you ever feel like a faded flower or withered grass?

You go outside to play ball with a grandson, or on a long hike with a nephew, and you can't believe how winded you are.

Or you try to “fix up” for a holiday party and your face surprises you with its lack of sparkle and color.

What about that let-down feeling that comes after a special Thanksgiving gathering, when everyone has gone home?

Or the day after Christmas, when the goodies are mostly eaten, the gifts are unwrapped and the bows and tissue paper are in the trash?

What about the days, weeks and months that follow a major change in your life- loss of a job, a child leaving home, retirement, death of a loved one. The days can feel so wrong- empty- not right. We do feel faded, withered. Changes, losses, illness, death- they all remind us of our frailty. We are fragile, vulnerable. Our power and strength are limited.

But guess what? Something is coming. Someone is coming. Christmas is coming. Coming to remind us that GOD is coming to

us with MIGHT. God is coming with the power and strength that we lack- the power and strength that we need.

This Isaiah passage provides the promise that God can and will get to us no matter where we are, no matter what our struggle. You know how they say, about the US mail, that through rain, snow and sleet, no matter what, the mail will get through? Isaiah's words are like that—proclaiming God will speed along to us, along level highways, smoothing out the mountains and hills, lifting up the valleys. God has the power to reach us through what may seem insurmountable obstacles.

Then Isaiah goes on to surprise us. Even though he says God comes with MIGHT, in the same breath he tells us God comes like a SHEPHERD. We don't generally think of shepherds as POWERFUL AND MIGHTY. But God's MIGHT, the force greater than any other in the universe, always CARES for us TENDERLY. God's power feeds the flock. God's power gathers us close. God's power carries us near the beating of God's own heart.

God's power brings us COMFORT and HOPE. Hear this Good News as we anticipate his coming.

Reflection #2
2 Peter 3:8-15a

“God comes with might, to transform us”

God comes with might. We hear this Good News and wait with longing hope. And we wait. And wonder- now, Lord? Are you coming now? Here, Lord, are you coming here? How are you coming?

This Scripture reminds us that God’s time is not like our time. We are called to trust in God’s faithfulness and power even though our impatience chafes us. We want to see struggles resolved, wounds healed NOW! Though it IS hard to wait, and God knows this, we are given encouragement and support for the waiting.

This second letter of Peter holds up several points to help us in our waiting.

First: we are assured that **GOD IS WORKING** to transform the world. It is happening right now, around us and even within us. One day God’s transformation will be complete. The image that is most vivid for the writer is the Hebrew picture of the “Day of the Lord”. That image portrays a radical upheaval- the overcoming of all that is evil and painful by an all-powerful God.

Second: This promise of God’s ultimate triumph is meant to be a source of strength for our daily struggles. We are urged to be a part of what God is doing in the meantime- especially by co-operating in our own **PERSONAL** transformation. This will “hasten the coming” of the day when God’s will is fully realized.

God comes with might
God is working to transform the world.

But, again, there is a surprise. Like the shepherd, who would never harm or punish wandering sheep, but gently steers them back to the fold, God is gentle in his transforming power. The two: power and gentleness, seem contradictory to us, but in God they MEET.

You see, we wonder why God is so SLOW in coming to change the world, but God's timing shows his compassion for us. God is not zipping into the world in full strength to transform this world because we're not ready.

God doesn't want ANY to perish, we're told. God yearns for us ALL to turn to him. God's timing is gentle. Like the potter who molds the clay, God's molding is wise and careful. We don't generally think of potters as POWERFUL AND MIGHTY. But God's MIGHT, the force greater than any other in the universe, transforms us with careful fingers, turning the wheel, shaping the clay little by little.

God's power transforms us, makes us new, with divine wisdom and timing. Hear this Good News as we anticipate his coming.

Reflection #3
Mark 1:1-8

“God comes with might, as a child”

John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of God into our lives. He preached with humility. He acknowledged he wasn't even fit for the duty of a SLAVE when it comes to “God among us”. He wasn't worthy to wash the muddy feet or remove the dirty sandals of the One who comes to us in the name of the Lord. John declared “God with us”, the Christ, to be MIGHTY, “mightier than I,” he said.

Listening to John, would we expect God's anointed one to be some sturdy young soldier, or even a great general?

But our God, the God of MIGHT greater than any other in the universe, came to us in a little child- in a helpless little baby.

That baby grew to show us the real nature of God's power and might. And that power always surprises us.

John said he was unworthy to untie Jesus' sandals.

But JESUS showed his power, divine power greater than any other in the universe, by doing just that. By untying sandals and washing feet.

Remember? Remember how he shared a last meal with his friends the night he was arrested? How he took off his outer clothing- Remember? He was like a slave among them—no clothing or signs of power, just a towel in his hand. Remember? He knelt at their feet, and when he came to Peter, the disciple tried to stop him. “Never, Lord! I can't let you do this!” But Jesus told him, “If you

can't let me minister to you in this way, then you can't be a part of what I am doing, of who I am.”

We don't generally think of servants as POWERFUL AND MIGHTY. But God's MIGHT, the force greater than any other in the universe, kneels at our feet to minister to our most humble needs—like a loving child or a caring friend, come to soothe our pain, and ease our weariness.

This Advent season I pray you might keep this image in your heart- of the power of God kneeling to wash feet. God comes with MIGHT, bringing us divine power. We are not called to submit to this power like mindless robots or marching soldiers. We are called to submit to God's power as Peter let Jesus wash his feet.

God comes with MIGHT, to hold us close like wandering lambs;
God comes with MIGHT, to mold and shape us with careful hands;
God comes with MIGHT, to wash us with care, making life fresh and new.

Hear this Good News as we anticipate his coming. Amen.