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## The Reign of God is all About Us

This morning the prophet cries, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—“ as the psalmist laments,” O Lord God of hosts, \*how long will you be angered despite the prayers of your people?” This begins our Season of Advent. Israel is in dire straits, still suffering the results of exile, as Jerusalem remains in ruins as her people wonder if, and when, Yahweh will act on their behalf. As I listen to the lament of ancient Israel, I must ask, is our story today that much different. Tension continues to build between United States and North Korea, talk of war is again being discussed by the media. Almost every week our national news relays stories of mass shootings both here at home and throughout the world. As we move from the man-made to the natural, the last four months have been fraught with tempests, floods and fire. All of which leaves us asking with ancient Israel, where is God, and when will God finally prevail over the darkness of this earth at a time when we are once again told to wait and to watch for God to intervene.

But are we waiting and watching for the right thing? Is it right to desire the Divine’s intervention to come as if through a tear in the heavens. To come in a way which defies the laws of nature. Is it right to ask the Almighty to press some sort of great reset button for creation in order for the world to be rebooted and restored to what God intended? The answer to this, the prophet tells us, is no. Instead, he implies redemption is a slow process, a process happening around us, of which we are practically unaware. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus declares we may “know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but we cannot interpret the signs of the times.” In this morning’s passage from Isaiah we are told God is the potter, and we with all creation, are the clay being molded and re-formed into what God intended.

Yes, the prophet declares, Israel will be restored. Yes, we are told each Advent, the reign of God will come, or better yet, as this morning’s Gospel implies, the reign of God is already present, just not complete, as we advance towards its fulfillment each and every day. All we have to do is look for the signs in the same way we look for the signs to know when summer is coming. That being, when the leaves begin to bud on the trees. Despite this only being December 3rd, the signs of summer are already around here. As the last leaves of fall drop to the ground, just beneath the bark, the leaves for next summer have already begun to form. In a similar fashion the signs of the reign of God are all around us, we just have to look for the light within the darkness. . .for the subtle signs of God’s arrival in the mundane processes of this world.

In 2014, Dr. Richard Wiley, presented a homily at my former parish addressing how subtly he believed God is at intervening through the mundane realities of this world. As a scientist, Dick

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firmly believed God created a well-ordered and dependable world. He trusted in a God who is reliable and worked predictably through creation and believed in something he called natural-miracles. To illustrate why he believed in natural miracles he shared the story of his fifth child's battle with cancer at the age of two. In the early seventies, there were not a lot of resources available for treating cancer. The specialists in Syracuse advised Dick and his wife, Jane, simply to take their child home and keep him comfortable as best they could until he died.

Luckily, Dick recalled, he and Jane had recently joined St. Luke's where a local Doctor was a parishioner. This doctor advised them to take their child to Buffalo where cutting edge research was being done in the area of pediatric cancer. To their good fortune, this fellow parishioner was able to have them seen immediately and the specialist they saw just so happened to be doing research on the exact cancer their son had. After several months of traveling back and forth to Buffalo their youngest child entered into remission and has continued in remission for over forty years.

Dick ended the homily with this statement. "As I think about all the things that had to come together in order for our son to survive, the fact we had just joined St. Luke's, that a member was able to refer us to just the right specialist, I have to ask, was our child's survival simply the result of a series of coincidence or was it a miracle of God working through the natural order. I will not tell you which it was, simply that I know what I believe to be true." For Dick, out of the darkness of his child's illness, he saw the hand of God actively at work about him. And, until his death, he lived with the assurance that the reign of God was close at hand.

As we join with the ancient children of Israel waiting and watching for the physical kingdom of Israel to be restored, we, who live on the other side of the resurrection already know, the prophecy has been fulfilled. . . not with God tearing through the heavens, but in the form of a humble child, whose first bed was a feeding trough. While others see only the darkness which infests our world today, as children of the resurrection, we are able to live in hope, knowing, the reign of God is at hand as we watch for the signs of God's hand at work about us, molding this world into the reign for which we patiently wait.

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