

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of my favorite things to do as a kid was read Calvin and Hobbes comics. It started as a special treat at the home of a family friend, where I'd read the collection books they had any time we'd go over to visit. As I grew older I began to procure my own collections, building up a sufficient supply of Calvin and Hobbes to take me through the year. One of the great things about Calvin and Hobbes is that it followed the flow of the year. In the summer, Calvin and Hobbes would venture far and wide. On the first day of school, Calvin would try his best to eke out the very last minutes of freedom. But, it was the yearly celebration of Christmas and winter that have stuck with me. Whether it was building protesting snowmen or taking the toboggan out for bigger and faster runs or throwing slushballs at the neighbor girl Susie, winter was special to Calvin and his best buddy Hobbes. As December rolled around however, something changed. The ever looming presence of Christmas, the anticipation of the arrival of Santa Claus and a haul of gifts, would get to Calvin as he seriously considered his actions, both in the immediate and throughout the year.

Calvin, the North Pole infamous "noodle incident" kid, was really a good kid at heart, but his active imagination and sense of justice in the world sometimes got him into some mischief, and he especially liked throwing slushballs at Susie (nearly 400 documented incidents according to an elf one Christmas). One year, Calvin surmises that Santa Claus cannot possibly watch every single kid all of the time, and as long as Santa punishes enough bad kids that it perpetuates the fear for everyone else keeping them mostly on the straight and narrow, and if that was the case, then one slushball at Susie in that particular moment

couldn't possibly be seen. Hobbes stops him by asking Calvin "What if Susie tells on you?" Which Calvin is quick to accept as a very potential reality due to her being a girl and all, and throwing the slushball down, proclaims "Well I sure hope Santa is watching now, seeing as I'm being so good." To which Hobbes answers, "Unwillingly good, but good nonetheless."

It is the anticipation of Christmas that drove Calvin every December to consider his actions. To consider the intent behind what he did. To consider the impact that his actions had on his own balance of "goodness" and whether or not that balance could be weighted just enough in his favor. And it was the anticipation of Christmas that kept him up late into the night on Christmas eve, only to awaken well before 6am to discover all of the presents gathered under the tree. Hobbes even mentions one Christmas Eve to Calvin, "Santa won't come until we're asleep you know?" To which Calvin shouts out, "I can't take the suspense!"

And that is where I find myself on this First Sunday of Advent. The anticipation of Christ drives me throughout the year, but in particular as we enter into advent, that anticipation ratchets up, and I can barely take the suspense. And how could I be expected to after reading today's Gospel?

"Keep awake" we are told. Be alert, know that Christ is coming and be prepared for that arrival. The anticipation of Christ, both coming for the first time in the city of Bethlehem and the triumphant second coming that we still await, is what drives us in this season in particular. And, it challenges us to stay focused on the message of Christ as our anticipation increases. It is easy to let anticipation turn into stress. It is easy to let joyous waiting turn into nerve-wracking impatience. It is this fine line that Calvin walks every

December throughout his life, and it this fine line that we too are called to walk in our own lives.

But, there is something in this balance joyous anticipation and nervous impatience that we must remember, it is the presence of Christ that is with us, always.

“Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

The message of Christ, the very words of Christ, are eternal in their very nature. The world will go through many changes. There will be times of joy. There will be times of suffering. As the end of time draws near, as the heaven and earth pass away, it will not be the end of things, but rather it will be as when the fig tree grows leaves marking that summer is near, for it is in these things happening that we know that He is near once more. And through all of this, we must be emboldened by the fact that the very words of Christ will be with us throughout all of this, for his words will not pass away. Everything else in this phase of creation will pass away, but the words of Christ will not pass away. There is comfort in this. There is comfort in the knowledge that even as we await Christ, we have the presence of Christ through his words with us throughout it all.

It has been quite the year in our world and the machinations of man seem poised to continue to work in favor of the rich and powerful (see: wealthy white men) to the detriment of everyone else (even the usually untouchable “middle class”). But, there are also glimmers of hope that justice and light are being done in this world. Much of what we have been hearing on the news lately, from a probably pedophile running for Senate to many powerful cultural icons being righteously fired for years of sexual misconduct, leaves us with a sense of dread about how our world works (or perhaps more accurately stated:

doesn't). And this sense of dread sucks any joy we might have right out of us. It leaves us questioning if even the genteel radio voice of a generation is not immune from this type of behavior, is anyone? Honestly, probably not. That's part of our reality as human beings. We all have the option of doing these types of things to each other. It doesn't take a special kind of someone, a "monster," to do monstrous things. And, this is somewhat terrifying. If anyone can do this, then how do we trust anyone? And if we can't trust anyone, is there any point to our joyous anticipation or should we just give into the anxiety and wish Jesus would hurry on up and get here already (again).

It is in our suffering, the suffering of ourselves, our loved ones, and the empathy we have for those who have been made to suffer, that it is doubly important to remember that Christ is still present with us. Even as we launch into a season predicated on anticipation, even as we launch into a season who's end goal is greeting the Christ child, we must remember that we have Christ's words with us, to guide us, to comfort us, to educate and empower us, and to let us know that even through the suffering, it is still ok to live into that sense of joyous anticipation that should be the hallmark of this season. In fact, it is our joyous anticipation for the coming of Christ (again) that should inform our reaction to the suffering of this world. It is our joyous anticipation that should be driving us to fight for justice for those who have been oppressed, victimized, silenced. It is our joyous anticipation that should be driving us to fight for equal access to all for all. It is our joyous anticipation that should be driving us to reach out to our friends, our family, even the stranger in the extended holiday shopping lines at the grocery store or the mall, and invite

them to come experience a different sensation this season by experiencing the presence of Christ that is with us, always, even as we await his coming with joy.

In the lead up to Christmas one year, Calvin proclaims to Hobbes “This whole Santa Claus thing just doesn’t make sense. Why all the secrecy? Why all the mystery? If the guy exists, why doesn’t he ever show himself and prove it? And if he doesn’t exist, what’s the meaning of all this?” Hobbes responds “I dunno, isn’t this a religious holiday?” And Calvin says “Yeah. But actually, I’ve got the same questions about God.”

We know that God exists, because he has shown himself and proven it in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We have that proof with us through the eternal words of Christ, words that will never pass away even as all of creation passes away around us. It is up to us to decide what we’re going to do with those words. It is up to us to decide how we will enter this season of anticipation as we await the coming of Christ. It is up to us to respond with joy, for it is in our joy that we know Christ, even when that joy calls on us to do the hard work that is being a follower of Christ as we continue to anticipate his coming again.

Amen.