



# ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

## Episcopal Church & Student Center

1309 R Street \* Lincoln, NE 68508 \* (402) 474-1979 \* [www.stmarks-episcopal.org](http://www.stmarks-episcopal.org)

The Rev. Jerrold Thompson, Rector  
Sermon for Third Sunday of Advent  
St. Mark's on the Campus  
December 16, 2007

**A** few weeks ago we had two babies born a week apart on Thursdays. You might remember that I joked we were making Thursday the regular day for giving birth. There will be a sign up sheet in the narthex!

Waiting and expectation are major themes in our readings for today.

- Awaiting the deliverance of God.
- Awaiting the Messiah.
- Awaiting the birth of a new age in God's creation.
- Awaiting.
- And expecting God to inaugurate new realities.

I suppose whenever we're waiting for God to do something, it's easy for us to start putting images to what that new thing would look like. I suspect that's part of what's going on with Isaiah's images about the desert blossoming and overflowing with water, the eyes of the blind being opened, the lame leaping like a deer, and the speechless singing for joy. They are ways of expressing what the reign of God might look like, especially if we are lame or blind or we've ever been caught in the desert on a car trip with not quite enough water; we know some visions of God's reign can be very personal. We know them as more than just images; they possess a level of literal reality that applies very personally.

Some of you know that for about thirty years I have lived with problems with pain in my feet, problems that have actually improved over the last several years. Each year at Christmas, I'm reminded of a special gift that Carol once gave me some years ago. It's a Christmas tree ornament of a green and blue striped left foot. Carol got it for me when my left foot was giving me particular problems. It's a simple gift, but wrapped up in that simple gift is for me a sign of the promise of God's reign and a hope that is very personal: that one day I won't have to live with pain in my feet, that I'll have *new feet*, if you will. Whatever that hope means in concrete terms, expressing it with such images as having new feet in the resurrection body is the only way I know to give voice to the promise of God to me about that future in which "sorrow and sighing flee away" for us all. Lots of us live every day with situations similar to mine.

- We might carry physical conditions in our bodies or emotional pains in our hearts.
- We might carry hopes for loved ones or expectations for a world that is more deeply faithful to the intentions for which God created it.
- We might carry all those visions to one degree or another: visions of how life will be when God completely reigns over reality – over our choices and the choices of others, over the natural world: when the entire creation labors to live into the longing of God for us all.

Some of those visions have been placed in the scriptures, and this time of year we hear a lot of them, just as we hear some today. A fairly critical reminder gets expressed in those visions. On the one hand, what we anticipate about the fullness of God's reign can sometimes be predicted. Think about Jesus' response to John's question from prison. John sends a message to Jesus, "Are you the one to come, or are we to wait for another?" And Jesus answers, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind have sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news proclaimed to them." Some signs of God's reign are clear. They are proclaimed in scripture and they are proclaimed in the depths of our hearts.

And there's another hand, too. God's vision is always greater than our own vision. Personally, I remember when all I wanted was a fix, a healing, a cure to my physical condition. But with years of praying, I was gradually led to a place of embracing the pain I experienced – to knowing it as a blessing -- something that at one time I never would have guessed I would say. By living into it more deeply rather than less, I found myself more deeply connected to the pain of others – and to the pain of God. Not *all* suffering is redemptive, but God can do amazing things when we let God work with what we are given.

One of the images the early Christians looked to for meaning about the person of Jesus is the suffering servant in Isaiah. We read the passage during Holy Week to remind us of this critical role that Jesus plays in the life of the world. Despite that image being in the religious tradition, Jesus' disciples resisted it when Jesus told them he must suffer and die. You might remember that Peter rebukes Jesus because it doesn't fit into what Peter expects. And Jesus tells Peter that God's way is to go *beyond* the expected.

- To bring children to Abraham and Sarah in their old age.
- To deliver the Israelites from the Egyptian army against all odds.
- To come into the world through a young unwed mother.
- To die on a cross.
- To rise again and live among those who trust in the power of God to redeem what is apparently unredeemable.
- To help us find meaning in the least likely places, where we think it's not to be found.

What is it that you expect as you come to the altar this morning? What do you hope for and what seems meaningless to you this morning? How much do you trust in God to redeem that which seems to you utterly unredeemable? And are you ready? Are you ready to be surprised by God? Are you ready to receive gifts this Christmas that you never expected to see?