

*Come, thou long expected Jesus, come in Spirit, come in Truth;  
come in Word, come in Bread and Wine; Come now, we pray. Amen.*

Second week in a row, we get “gloom and doom” from our Gospel readings.  
Come on, Jesus! Where’s the good news?

If we want to be frightened, we can watch the news, right?

It seems like the world keeps getting scarier – except remember a year ago?

We’d just endured one of the scariest years on record; surely things are better  
this year? We’re vaccinated and boosted... but here comes Omicron!

For millions of people it’s been this scary for years. It’s just hit closer to us recently.

Fear was omnipresent in the culture in which Jesus lived –

the Roman empire was as bad as any of our terrors in its brutality.

Those to whom Jesus was speaking, and those for whom these gospels were  
written, wouldn’t see these readings as scary – they were even comforting.

How we see always depends on where we’re looking.

There is always something to fear, because the world is always crashing down  
around someone’s ears ... but there is also always more to the story.

Because God is in the business of flipping the script.

The story we are in the middle of is much greater and longer than we can imagine.

God’s story is a story of rebuilding, of reclaiming, restoring and renewing  
all of creation to wholeness in Christ.

When I remember that, I live in a story of Love, not a story of Fear.

Being ready as Jesus tells us to means turning ourselves to detect the Story of  
Love that runs alongside the Fear, the story of restoration we are weaving.

So let me tell you the story of a boy for whom his world ended a few times.

Maybe it ended when a brother was shot by gangs in El Salvador.

Maybe it ended his family took the huge risk of trying to send him to the U.S.  
and he said goodbye to his home and loved ones. Let’s call him Eduardo.

I actually know nothing about this boy, but he is currently one of tens  
of thousands unaccompanied minors in detention centers around the U.S.

His story intersected with my sister’s story last Sunday.

At her church they do a Christmas Giving Tree and they gather gifts for the  
unaccompanied minors at a local holding facility.

As she looked at the tags, one caught her eye: Flute. Age: 14.

A flute is kind of a high-ticket item for a Giving Tree... but what 14-year-old boy asks for a flute? She thought, "Maybe I can make this happen for him..."

As she began to research she learned there are many kinds of flutes.

Learner flutes are different from regular flutes or concert flutes...

did this boy already play? She got in touch with the social worker at the Center.

"I noticed that one too," she said, "And thought about pulling it because it would be so expensive... but then I thought, "What kind of 14-year-old boy asks for a flute? Maybe we can make this happen for him..."

Turns out Eduardo had always wanted to learn to play the flute.

So my sister began looking for a beginner's flute on Craig's List and lo and behold, someone nearby was selling his daughter's beginner's flute for \$75.

A \$500 flute, much higher quality than many of the used ones she saw going for \$200 or \$250, for \$75. She drove over and bought it – and with it came a bunch of beginner's music books. Eduardo would learn to play the flute.

God flipped the script.

In the midst of destruction and despair, God's song comes through – in a flute.

Today we are marking St. Andrew's Day as well as Advent I, with the pipes and the drums. This joyful celebration represents a restoration.

The Scots suffered decades of severe repression under British rule and the Proscription Act, which forbade the wearing of "highland clothing."

Wikipedia tells me *"It was part of a series of efforts to assimilate the Scottish Highlands, ending their ability to revolt." The penalties for wearing "highland clothing" as stated in the Dress Act 1746 were "imprisonment, without bail, during the space of six months...; and being convicted for a second offence before a court of judicary or at the circuits, shall be liable to be transported..." No lesser penalties were allowed for.[2] 1*

There is some question as to whether or not piping or even tartans were banned outright, but someone has written that, *"the removal of the principal use for tartan meant that the skills used for dyeing and particularly, the technicalities of weaving it, meant that much of the traditional know-how was lost within a generation. And with it, some ancient patterns undoubtedly disappeared."*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tartansauthority.com/tartan/the-growth-of-tartan/the-act-of-proscription-1747/>;  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act\\_of\\_Proscription\\_1746](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Proscription_1746)

So when, after 35 years of cultural repression, the ban was lifted,  
some of the life and culture that had been lost returned.  
In the midst of destruction and despair, God's song came through – in a bagpipe.

The night Jesus was born was a night of chaos, fear and pain,  
as a homeless couple far from their native city were forced to find  
a meager shelter because the woman was giving birth.  
And through that night of chaos, fear and pain; through the lowing of cattle  
and baaing of sheep and wails of a woman in labor came a new sound:  
the first cry of an infant boy.  
In the midst of destruction and despair, God's song came through  
in the cry of a newborn.

It is that little baby's coming that we anticipate in the season of Advent,  
that grown man's power and love and sacrifice we celebrate every Sunday.  
It is his coming that we are to be ready for.

The word Advent means "coming on," and it invites us to anticipate the coming  
of God – at Christmas, at the end of the ages, and all the time.  
Advent invites us to be ready, to prepare for a future we cannot see,  
but which we believe by faith is the ultimate good.

Being alert, being awake, being ready for God's coming means being open  
to God's appearing in all kinds of places and people and situations, even now;  
little foretastes of the major Coming.

It's not even so much looking around to see "where is God?" "Is he coming now?"  
as letting God find us amidst the clutter of our lives; slowing ourselves down,  
taking time to breathe and be and say, "Here I am again, God. Where are you?"  
"Where are you flipping the script around me?"

What unexpected hope or light do we see coming into dark places  
and despairing people? What unexpected hope or light are we bringing into  
dark places and despairing people?

In the midst of destruction and despair, God's song comes through...  
do you hear it? Are you singing along?

Amen.

**Luke 21:25-36**

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."