

Column

A Christian song which has had several seasons of popularity over the years opens with the words, “Troublesome times are here, filling men's hearts with fear.” The chorus that follows gives the antidote to this fear, “Jesus is coming soon, morning or night or noon.”

I checked the background of this song and found R. E. Winsett wrote it in the midst of the Second World War in 1942. In 1969, it was the “Song of the Year” at the first GMA Dove Awards.

Interest in our Lord’s Second Coming seems to parallel what is going on in the world. If times are good, it does not get as much press, but when times are rough the doctrine is again centre-stage, as it has been in 2020. In the wake of a contentious presidential election, the coronavirus pandemic and violence in the streets, many are asking if His glorious appearing may be just around the corner.

The Christian Church, following our Lord’s own teachings found in the New Testament, encourages balance on this subject. On one hand, the fact of our Lord’s second appearing is clearly affirmed, but wild speculation about the date and hour is discouraged. This balanced approach might be summarized like this: the Christian should keep one eye on the eastern sky, the other on the furrow God has given him to plow here below. Hope and Kingdom work must not be split apart.

One way the Church keeps this balance is by providing the season which begins Nov. 29 in 2020. This season is called Advent. On the four Sundays in Advent, Christians prepare not only for the liturgical celebration of Christ’s first coming – Christmas -- but also for His Second Coming at the end of the age.

In this time, Christians are encouraged to think about their task in the present. This task could be summed up in a word, witness. Jesus’ people are called to be lights, lights pointing men and women to the Light of the World.

More than that, there are practical things they can do to make this present world a better place, a place of greater justice. For example, the English statesman William Wilberforce did not wait for Jesus to come again to work for the abolition of the slave trade. He spent two decades campaigning for it. The fruit of his labour came with the passage in Parliament of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

Somehow Wilberforce's work and ours will count when Jesus comes again to raise the dead and to bring in the Kingdom of God in its fullness. Paul tells us as much in 1 Corinthians 15:58. He ends this chapter in which he deals with the coming resurrection with these words:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain” (RSV).

Jesus is coming. Hitch your plow and get to plowing!

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen. (Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, Book of Common Prayer)

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