

Column

Recently I was in a church where the minister had a little verbal exchange going on between him and members of his congregation. He would say: God is good. To which they respond: He is good all the time.

If their response was not as robust as he thought it ought to be, he would go through it again. By the second or third time, the pump would be primed, and what only could be described as a roar would come from the congregation.

Over time I could see this little ditty getting monotonous and stale. Nevertheless, its words are true and scriptural. The author of Lamentations sends out a similar reminder to the people of his day when he writes: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

God IS good, and we come face to face with the truth of these words often at times we lest expect. Such an occasion came a few days ago when I received word that a parishioner was in the emergency room of the local hospital after experiencing chest pains.

I immediately drove to the hospital and was allowed to go back to where the patient was. She was in bed with her purse beside her, ready for discharge. Surprised to see me, she said: "I was trying to figure out how I was going to get home, and here you are."

She went on to explain that when the ambulance arrived at her apartment and as the EMTs prepared her for transport, she remembered to take her purse but forgot to leave a set of car keys for her neighbor. Had she done so, this neighbor could have driven her car to the hospital and picked her up. That had not happened, and now she was without a ride . . . until I walked in.

As she finished, words of Isaiah 65:24 came to mind: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." If you think about it, that is pretty much what happened that evening. The God who many years earlier had anticipated the needs of His ancient people was doing it again in regard to this dear soul.

We find ourselves in Advent, a season in which we are invited to look back at God's promises in scripture and how those promises were faithfully fulfilled. The king and saviour long expected came.

Also, in this season we are invited to look forward to His Second Coming and what will follow: new heavens and a new earth, a new order of the ages in which sin and death, sorrow and sighing will be no more. God's faithfulness in the past provides powerful incentive to believe that those promises found in scripture pertaining to His second coming will be fulfilled with the same exactness as those anticipating His first.

In like manner, God remains active in the present. Before we call, He hears. We know this from scripture but also from the many little serendipities that come our way in daily life, such as the one involving the woman needing a ride home from the hospital.

"God is good. He is good all the time" is more than a slogan to be shouted out at church. It is a truth to be remembered and lived day by day. Advent is a good time to begin.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (Collect for Second Sunday in Advent, Book of Common Prayer)

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