

In days to come
Isaiah 2:1-5
December 2, 2007

In days to come ...

Do you think about days to come?

About the days to come next April, when all this winter mess will be gone and the sun will warm the ground and the trees limbs and the garden beds and the land will turn green again? Or the days next summer when you will stand on the shore of a Canadian lake listening to the loons, or hike mountain trails in Colorado or Maine, or sun yourself on a beach at Clear Lake or the Ozarks?

Do you think about the days to come when your eight-year-old will be eighteen years old, when she will graduate from high school and then college and start her own career and her own family? Do you think about the days to come when you will retire? Do you think about the days to come when your children will retire?

Do you think about the days to come when your grandchildren will have grandchildren, days to come when all who would have remembered you are gone and you are forgotten even by your own descendants, when all traces of your life are forgotten, except perhaps a name listed in a family genealogy or scribbled on the back of an old photograph? Days to come when all that will remain of you will be the invisible imprint of faith or character or duty or loyalty passed by you to your children and they to their children and on and on through the generations?

Do you think about the days to come when history itself will have grown old and tired, when the last chapter of this world is ready to be written? Do you think about the last days, which in God's hand and by God's love will be the first days?

Do you think about days to come? Or do you have your hands full just thinking about what you have to do to make it through to tomorrow? Is dreaming about days to come simply a luxury you can't afford? Or a waste of your precious time with which you don't want to be bothered?

It is a great irony that the more we understand our environment, the more we understand the social and political and economic forces that shape our history, the more we are able to discern and predict patterns of change and evolutionary outcomes and long-term effects, the more we know about the past and can foretell about the future ... the more we are preoccupied with the present! The longer our outlook, the shorter our attention span!

Don't you agree? We know more in our own day about the history of the human race and the universe itself than ever before and we can predict the consequences of our behaviors better than ever before, but our attention span is shorter than ever before.

Who writes long books anymore, the 900 pages of *Moby Dick* or the 1400 pages of *War and Peace* or the 1800 pages of *Les Miserables*? Or if they do still write long books, who reads them?

Or for that matter, who reads? We watch TV, rent movies, surf the net, listen to our iPods. We want our entertainment in dense little chunks, quickly and easily consumed. Who is ready anymore to sit through a three and a half hour ballet or a forty-five minute sermon? Have you ever watched a music video? The images come and go so quickly, providing powerful and immediate sensory stimulation, but allowing little time for reflection or engagement of the imagination.

We live longer, but have less time. We have more, but are less inclined to give. We can see farther, but don't care to look.

We aren't thinking about days to come, but about right here, right now. We aren't concerned about the fate of our grandchildren's grandchildren, and, as much as I hate to admit it, we often aren't even concerned with the fate of our children, the fate of the very next generation. We are preoccupied with our own concerns, our own security, our own gratification. The only days to come we are thinking about and planning for are the days of our own retirement.

Is that too harsh? I am not trying to make a personal attack, but just trying to be honest about the focus of the present generation. Isn't it true that we demand immediate solutions? Isn't it true that we have a hard time with delayed gratification and with sacrifice, especially if we won't be around to see the results? Isn't it true that we want our piece of the pie now, and don't really care whether we leave any pie for those who come after us? We don't want to be bothered about days to come.

*In days to come
the mountain where the Temple stands
will be the highest one of all
towering above all the hills.
Many nations will come streaming to it,
and their people will say,
"Let us go up the hill of the Lord,
to the Temple of Israel's God.
He will teach us what we want us to do;
we will walk in the paths he has chosen.
For the Lord's teaching comes from Jerusalem;
from Zion he speaks to his people."

He will settle disputes among great nations.
They will hammer their swords into plows
and their spears into pruning knives.
Nations will never again go to war,
never prepare for battle again.*

They didn't care about days to come! The army of mighty Assyria was camped outside the city walls. They needed a way out now. They needed a way to turn certain defeat into resounding victory now. Nations streaming to their Temple? People seeking the wisdom of their God? Days when nations will never again go to war? Not in their lifetime! Not in the lifetime of their grandchildren's grandchildren!

But the prophet invited them to think about days to come. The Lord asked them to focus their attention, not on the dire circumstances staring them in the face, but on days to come. The Lord asked them to see what to them was invisible, to believe what to them was impossible, to live in a way that to them was unthinkable.

In the face of threat, in the presence of fear and uncertainty, the question for them is not *What shall we do?*, but *Shall we do it? Shall we walk in the light the Lord gives?* The crucial issue -- spiritual, political, whatever -- is not wishing for peace, but living it. Peace is not a result, but a way. The Lord tells them what it will be like in days to come and shows them the way to get there.

In the face of threat, in the presence of fear and uncertainty, the crucial question for us is not *What shall we do?*, but *Shall we do it? What matters is not wishing for peace, but living it.*

Let us walk in the light the Lord gives! And that light is Jesus ...

Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the light of our world, shining in the darkness, never to be put out by the darkness. That's why we celebrate Advent. That's why we light candles. That's why we light a candle of hope on the first Sunday of Advent year after year after year, to remind ourselves that we are not in the dark!

So think about days to come! Think about your grandchildren's grandchildren. Think about the generations of humanity that will come after you, the generations of humanity that will come after us.

Think about the world as it will become, shaped by the choices you make, and think about the world as it will be, by God's choice, by God's will. Think about days to come and walk today in the light the Lord gives. Take Jesus' way!