

Fearing the One I Love

Our trouble lies not in heavy-handed religion but in banal lullabies that assure us that God is love, all love, and only wants our best—‘best’ defined by our doing whatever we want.

Our trouble lies in the fact that we no longer fear God. We want the benefits of the Cross but not the call to carry our own. We have made Him in our image, not submitted to the One in whose image we are made. We then dare to shake our fist at any version of Him that gets in the way of our version of ourselves.

For this trouble Advent may not be long enough. For this the Church is genius. Our calendar year ends with Daniel’s apocalyptic vision of the Ancient One ascending His throne—radiant, smoking hot—His royal seat blazing—‘a surging stream of fire flowing out from where He [the Father] sat’ and received the Son before whom the whole host of heaven bows down and declares: ‘dominion, glory and kingship’ (Daniel 7).

In the middle of the fireworks God incinerates His main adversary--the Beast-- while lesser beasts are granted a season in which to do their dirty work. Have these lesser beasts charmed us, made us beastly? They give us what we want, including just enough spirituality to assuage our touchy souls. We are sleepy, full of unbaptized ideas and vague discontent. We ladle another round of boozy good cheer and cry ‘abuse’ when the religious disagree with us.

Advent begins, our New Year dawns, not with dreamy glimpses of angels and virgins and starry nights but with an alarm. Wake up people! You think all is well? Think again! The first Sunday in Advent highlights Jesus’ Second Coming; His re-entry will be violent, decisive and conclusive. Of the two men out in the field, only one will be plucked out by Jesus to escape the terror at hand (Matt. 24). No wonder the second Sunday features John the Baptist’s call to repent of every worthless thing we cherish—to get rid of it now before Jesus Himself burns it up ‘with unquenchable fire’ (Matt. 3:1-12).

God is love. And fearsome. For me, these first few days of Advent have been tough, full of minor humiliations that have exposed by touchiness and subtle adulteries of heart. I haven’t much more to offer Him than my sin. So be it. Better to burn now than later.

I fear this God. Yes, He loves me, deeply, ‘His Spirit longs for me jealously’ (James 4:5). He has laid claim to me through His blood and has a right to the whole of me. Every haggard part. All well? Nah: I’m burdened by pet beasts. Wellness to me is facedown, crying ‘dominion, glory, kingship.’ My happiness hinges upon full surrender.

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