

How many of you were home for Thanksgiving? How many of you went home? How long were you there? For some families, it may be only a few hours, but it feels like an eternity. It reminds me of a Rhymes with Orange cartoon. The dog asks the cat, "How long is eternity?" The cat answers, "Twelve hours." The dog says, "That's it?" The cat responds, "When people go to heaven they're supposed to reunite with their families for eternity...Twelve hours with their families is about the longest people can take."

Some of us can't go home for the holidays, and some of us don't want to. So I got to wondering what Jesus would be thinking if he came home again. On this first Sunday in Advent, the traditional readings are always about the Second Coming of Jesus. The first Christians thought that he was coming back soon. But the longer we have to wait, the more we begin to doubt that he is ever going to return or that he would want to.

Remember, it wasn't exactly easy for him the first time he was here. It wasn't all silent night, holy night. Remember when he tried to go home to Nazareth at the start of his ministry? When he preached in the synagogue there, they nearly threw him off a cliff. You see, even Jesus can't go home again. Or as John's Gospel put it: "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." [John 1:11] After that, Jesus didn't really have a home. He told his followers, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." [Mark 8:20; Luke 9:58]

I know of a lot of former residents of The Jungle [former homeless encampment in San Jose] who could relate to that. Every time they find a new place to sleep, the cops come and make another sweep. I hear they are making a couple of sweeps every week.

When Jesus got to Jerusalem, the religious authorities wanted to sweep him out of the way as well. He was again

despised and rejected. He became a man of suffering, acquainted with infirmity. [Isaiah 53:3] Yet he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. [Philippians 2:8]

That's what happened to Jesus the first time. Do you suppose that's why it's taking him so long to come back a second time? If you think about it, the human race is like one big dysfunctional family. Can you imagine how uncomfortable Christ would be around our global Thanksgiving table? Half of us would be hoarding the turkey and stuffing. The other half would be starving. Late arrivals would find the gate locked, and they would have to be background checked before we let them in the front door. As soon as they were seated, someone would start talking politics or religion and we would all get out our sharp knives. Everyone would start yelling at once; no one would listen. Our poor host and hostess, try as they might, would not be able to get our attention. They would sit there,

sobbing into their sweet potatoes, while the kids would run and hide in the kitchen. If the world were a dinner table, I'm afraid that's what Jesus would come home to.

Where in the world *could* Jesus come home to? The first Christians expected Jesus to come back to Jerusalem, of course, and reign as their king. So it's sad to think that Jerusalem is in no better shape now than when he left long ago. In Jesus' day, the city was occupied by the Roman army. Today, soldiers still occupy the city. In Jesus' day, there was a constant threat of terror. Anyone could be arrested for almost anything and killed for nothing. It isn't much different today.

But it's easy for us to point at the mess in the Middle East, satisfied that it's a long way away. The truth is that we have terrorists right here in the good ol' US of A. They shoot up abortion clinics and movie theaters, schools and churches, but we don't call them terrorists, unless they are Muslim.

Considering that Jesus gave us just one commandment—to love one another as he loved us [John 15:12]—what do you think he would say if he came back today? Don't you suppose that he might ask us, "What on earth have you been doing these past 2,000 years?" Not learning to love one another, that's for sure.

If I were Jesus, I might want to skip the Second Coming, but fortunately, I am not Jesus. The Jesus I know is coming—is always coming—home. And I'm not talking about the Ascension; I don't mean his home in heaven, where he can be safe and not have to be disappointed that we aren't ready for him. God's home is not in heaven, anyway, according to the Book of Revelation. "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them..." [Rev 21:3]

So Jesus' true home is among us mortals, no matter how messed up we are. When Jesus comes home, he comes right here. And there are signs of his coming everywhere.

The Gospel of Luke says there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars. But I don't think that we will see them by gazing into the heavens. We are much more likely to see the signs that are right here on earth. Luke says that there will be distress among nations and that they will be confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

Does that describe the reality we see today? Let's look at what's going on through the lens of Luke: There certainly is a lot of distress among nations now. We are on the verge of many different wars at once and in our heads they all start to converge into one big roar. Politicians are no help. They are busy stoking our fears and, thanks to them, we faint with foreboding of what is coming upon the world. The powers of

heaven may be shaken, as Luke says, but I'm here to say that by the power of God, we will never be forsaken.

Christ is the power that comes into our distress. Christ is the peace that can be heard over the roaring of the sea and the waves. So my best advice is this: don't listen to the politicians and don't let yourself be turned around by the evils in this world. Just keep singing to yourself the old spiritual Joan Baez used to sing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around..."

Christ is coming home to help us build that brand new world where nation shall not lift up sword against nation and neither shall they learn war anymore. [Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3] But first he's going to have to build a brand new human being. So I think we'll find the very first signs of his coming in you and in me. After all, the wars start here in our own homes. The fear festers and prejudices are planted here in our own hearts.

Jesus says: "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the

worries of this life..." Translation: "Heads up. I'm coming into your home because you could use my help. The life you are living is weighing you down. It is distracting you and dragging and drugging you and making you worry about everything except what is most important. This life is going to kill you and so I'm coming because I love you and I want to save you.

"After all, someone needs to tell you that you are too precious to me to waste your life on worldly pleasures and false promises; that you are worth more to me than anything you could ever earn or accomplish; that I'm not impressed if you have a good job, a nice house, a new car and a garage too full of your stuff to park it in; and I don't care if you measure up to anyone's standard of success or celebrity or beauty, because you are a delight to me. Someone needs to tell you that it doesn't matter if your mother didn't love you or your father abandoned you or your brother can't stand you, because I love you. And your spouse and your kids don't have to be perfect

because I am everything you ever wanted and everything you ever needed. The truth is that you may be smart, but you're not very wise and it's past time that you learned how to live so that I can come home and live with you."

Friends, Jesus was right: there is distress among nations on this earth. And we can look at and certainly pray for all the faraway places and people that need Christ to come this year. But we have to remember that when Christ comes home, Christ comes here. "When these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."