

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

2020 has been quite a year; so much has happened this year, even on top of the pandemic, that we really haven't had a chance to process it all. In a way we've been looking toward 2021 with hope that even if things don't go back to the old normal, we will have a chance to breathe again, and perhaps even work through the backlog of responses to what has happened in our lives and in the world. This covid year has brought us into dimensions of human experience most of us haven't known for decades . . . and is completely new for others. Where do we even find language to talk about what is happening? How do we express in words the world's grief over loved ones, a real fear of contracting the virus, the loss of simple blessings like having friends over for dinner, and adapting to life with illnesses – and all these things compounding on each other?

I have a new appreciation for apocalyptic language. I used to imagine images of quaking mountains and the sun going dark having their origins in dreams and visions. I never imagined I might look at the physical world around me and resonate with phrases like, “and the stars will be falling from heaven.” But it's at these unprecedented times that Isaiah's prayer, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—” seems about right. The imagery is wild enough to capture not only what is happening for us, but to express the immensity of our God . . . and it is gifted to us as we enter into Advent, the beginning of a new church year. Who needs a big God right now? I sure do, even if knowing this big, mysterious God means acknowledging the darkness when the stars fall from the sky.

During these dark and often rainy nights, where there isn't a star in the sky, when we have all the reasons to see the dark as unsettling, we do have choice about how we approach it. What we believe about the darkness powerfully shapes our experience of it. The literal darkness of these long nights can be for us

many things: it can be a time of waiting when the power goes out, it can represent fear, death and grief . . . it can stand for blinding anger. This darkness that bookends our days can also be for us a relief from the busyness of summer, a time to slow down and ponder. The darkness can be a womb, where something magical is growing and preparing to be born. The darkness can be mystery, wonder. If you light a candle before night comes, it has very little effect on the level of light in the room . . . but lighting a candle in the darkness . . . that is the presence of mystery . . . a connection to hope.

When the sun goes dark, the effect is immediate. We experienced a partial eclipse a few years ago. I think it was a warm day in August or September, because I remember when the moon blocked the light of the sun, the temperature cooled dramatically and everything around me looked like twilight. Imagine if we hadn't been able to predict it or known what caused it or how long it would last.

Here in the vastness of the dark, the hours and hours of darkness, here in the weeks of waiting, here with the thoughts we dare not think and the feelings too big to feel, here in this space, God lives. It's like this space before creation, when love has an idea. Our gigantic, cosmic, mysterious God occupies this space, this mystery, and whispers to us, do not be afraid; I am with you . . . and I am coming to you. Remembering that we belong to this God when we are surrounded by darkness can be the difference between despair and hope. Knowing we are not alone in the dark, even when we can't find a match, gives us hope that there is a match to be found.

God makes the journey every year from this big, cosmic presence to Emmanuel, God with us; God makes the journey from the spirit of love to the embodiment of love, and is born in human form . . . each year God blows our minds and bursts into our hearts. It's a long journey from here to there . . . And in this season, we have every reason to hope, because God is that big.

For the first time in a long time the apocalyptic language fits . . . we have experienced the end of the world as we know it; and this virus has forced us to look at the world from a different perspective, which makes space for something new to be born. By the time we get to Christmas it will be about 9 months of our lives disrupted, turned upside down, our country, our world just devastated . . . we have all seen the

miracles that are born into the world in that amount of time, so we have every reason to hope that our God will be born again into the world and make God's self known.