

December 7, 2008  
Second Sunday in Advent  
FCMF #1

## ***“Comfort Squared”***

Today begins the Second week of Advent,

a time of gettin ready or as Mark would say,

“preparing ourselves for the coming of our Lord!”

Last Sunday, or November 30th be exact,

would then have been the official start of the season

that we use for gettin ready for Christmas.

But in our country the Liturgical Calendar

no longer sets the times nor the tones

for our preparation for the coming of Jesus.

According to most news outlets, the day after Thanksgiving,

or Black Friday is when the official starting gun is fired!

(And this year, sadly, guns literally were blazing on Black Friday

leaving two dead in a ToysRUs in southern California!)

Not only have the retailer usurped the church for selection of the start time

it is also now setting in the tone

and the meaning of the season as well!

Now the scriptures from the lectionary last week

were filled with some rather ominous images!

Of heavenly bodies and the forces of nature in great upheaval.

It would seem that the coming of God is both

a wonderful anticipatory event

as well as a wonderfully scary thing!

Not to be out done our consuming culture is catching up

in offering excitement, exhilaration and

a even a more ominous meaning to the term, Black Friday:

“A Wal-Mart worker died early Friday after an "out-of-control" mob of frenzied shoppers smashed through the Long Island store's front doors and trampled him, police said.

The Black Friday stampede plunged the Valley Stream outlet into chaos, knocking several employees to the ground and sending others scurrying atop vending machines to avoid the horde.

When the madness ended, 34-year-old Jdimytai Damour was dead and four shoppers, including a woman eight months pregnant, were injured. "He was bum-rushed by 200 people," said Wal-Mart worker Jimmy Overby, 43. "They took the doors off the hinges. He was trampled and killed in front of me. "They took me down, too ... I didn't know if I was going to live through it. I literally had to fight people off my back," Overby said.

Damour, a temporary maintenance worker from Jamaica, Queens, was gasping for air as shoppers continued to surge into the store after its 5 a.m. opening, witnesses said. Even officers who arrived to perform CPR on the trampled worker were stepped on by wild-eyed shoppers streaming inside, a cop at the scene said.

Witness Kimberly Cribbs said shoppers acted like "savages." "When they were saying they had to leave, that an employee got killed, people were yelling, 'I've been on line since Friday morning!'" Cribbs said. "They kept shopping."

Damour was taken to Franklin Hospital and pronounced dead at 6:03 a.m.

Items on sale at the Wal-Mart store included a \$798 Samsung 50-inch Plasma HDTV, a Bissel Compact Upright Vacuum for \$28 and Men's Wrangler Tough Jeans for \$8.

The Long Island store reopened at 1 p.m. and was packed within minutes.  
New York DAILY NEWS, Friday, November 28th 2008,  
[rschapiro@nydailynews.com](mailto:rschapiro@nydailynews.com)

As John Lennon sang, “So this is Christmas?”

To which we might respond, tweaking his next line,

And, what have we become!

Where are you God?!

The sensational nature of the Daily News aside,

This is definitely sobering commentary on

the depths we have sunk to in this nation!

Why don't you split open the skies, God!

Shake things up and come down and save us?!

Last week I talked about two compelling images

of the God who is coming to us.

One is the God who created and controls the universe

Coming dramatically with earthquakes a shakin,

and volcanos erupting, with comets a crashin and solar eclipses.

The other image is equally as dramatic and equally as valid,

the gentle potter, the budding tree and the little baby.

Isaiah this morning starts out with the latter, or comfort squared!

not comfort that is culturally out of touch, ie: “square,”

but comfort to the exponential power!

Your punishment is over! He declares!

This is good news, this is comforting!

And Isaiah insists, this “good news” must be proclaimed!

Mark then incorporates Isaiah’s vision

claiming that John the Baptist was

such a “voice crying in the wilderness!”

Mark also claims to be sharing with us the “Good News!”

And what exactly is Isaiah’s and Mark’s, “Good news?”

For Isaiah it is our mortality- you are mortals,

you are merely grass that quickly withers and blows away!

We are all like flowers, beautiful today but gone tomorrow!

Mark indicates that his Good News has something to do with getting wet,

of repentance, of changing one’s actions

and attitudes and of forgiveness?

So is mortality really good news?

Is the necessity of repentance and living right the good news?

Is forgiving and being forgiven really good news?

Yessir, you betcha! That wonderful, extra, “Good News!”

I think that insignificance can be a good thing?

What a relief it is not trying to live forever, or wanting to rule the world!

Trying to maintain in total control, trying to act like God

is not only tiring, but it can be hazardous

to our physical and spiritual health.

Being a flower is far easier and still satisfying:

being beautiful for a time but gracefully fading away!

And forgiveness! Yes, what a relief it is as well!

We can be forgiven, we can change and start over!

God forgets our mistakes and will not hold them against us!

All our pettiness and insecurities have been release to the cosmos!

Like balloons they have slowly floated out of sight.

Our punishment is over! The compelling desire of God has triumphed!

All who have been held captive have been set free,

even those who continue to inflict punishment on themselves!

Set free, loosed and forgiven,

we are now able forgive others and to forgive ourselves!

Freedom, sweet freedom!

“Hallelujah, the great storm is over, lift up your wings and fly!”

“Comfort, be comforted, my people” the debt is paid!

God has paid it not with punishment but with love!

And it is Love that is far more compelling

than punishment or despair ever were.

And through this love we are now actually connected with eternity,

connected with the only thing that is truly eternal!

God! God alone is eternal, eternal in existence,

eternal in presence, eternally just and the eternal source of truth!

Comfort, comfort to you Steve... Cathy... Eliza... Susie...etc,

God says it to you, each of you!

Each time our voice cries out into void of our own wilderness  
the eternal one comes! Comfort, Comfort!

And if we find ourselves in times of such deep despair  
that we cannot even manage a whisper?

The eternal one comes!

And also when we cannot cry out, others will cry out for us!

Perhaps it will even be a chorus of voices  
emminating out from a “community of right relationships.”

But let us also not forget that

God wants all his children, maybe even all of creation  
to hear the words of comfort!

To those whose worlds are literally shaking from the bombs of war,

A voice must cry out!

For the poor in our own city who cannot find food or housing,

A voice must cry out!

For our brother or sister in need sitting next to us

a voice must cry out!

And when any of “the least of these” can no longer cry out

or when their voice is silenced or the ears of the powerful are stopped,  
the rest of us must then be that voice!

“Lift your glad voices in triumph on high,  
for Jesus has risen and we shall not die!” Oops! wrong season.

Or is it?... isn't that really the reason for this season?

Christmas after all, is not the culminating act of the story,  
rather it is only the beginning of the story?

I have this crazy idea floating in my head.

A real world image of crying in a wilderness not so far away.

What if we took our guitars and tambourines and our drums  
down to Wal-Mart, or Target or maybe the Foothills Mall  
and in our best Godspell reenactment begin to dance and sing,  
“Prepare ye the way of the Lord!”

It just might be rather amazing,  
or exhilarating, perhaps even wonderful!

No doubt we might encounter some shock and awe,  
maybe even elicit some fear and trembling?

I'm not sure if these are places of wilderness in our culture  
or whether we are to call folks out of those places to a place  
that is sparse and devoid of the trappings of materialism?

In either case let us not be naive,  
the wilderness is a dangerous place, and people die in the wilderness!

No doubt we have all said, jokingly that some folks live to shop.

Last weeks events have made painfully aware  
that some folks can literally die to shop!

Where are our places of wilderness?

And why do we shop? Is it fear?

Do we buy more and more stuff in order to soothe our anxieties?

Are we afraid of scarcity?

Fearing that there will not be enough for me?

Is the denial of our mortality causing problems?

Are buying skin creams, exercise machines, sports cars,  
impotency drugs and other things simply a vain attempt  
at resisting the natural course of life.

Do we confuse owning with satisfaction

and the exhilaration of gifting with what brings true joy?

But a voice cries out into our place of loneliness,

comfort, comfort says God to those she loves!

To those who fear the loss of of body and mind!

Comfort, comfort says our God!

To those anxious about their job security,

Comfort, comfort says the Eternal One.

To those worried about the decreasing value of their retirement funds.

Comfort, comfort says the Ancient of days.

To those who agonize over violence inflicted on the innocent!

Comfort, comfort says the only One who is Just.

My people, there is good news,  
and it is actually the best news for all concerned.

Comfort, comfort you are My People says God!

God is coming. Comfort, comfort ya all!

God is here! Comfort, comfort,

in excelsis Deo!

And yes God has always been with us!

Comfort, comfort my people,

Joy to the World! For God is love!

and God so loved the world that...

we now have and know love unbounded and free!

Comfort, be comforted my people,

even those few who gather faithfully at FCMF!

Comfort, know comfort,

for God is enough!