

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.  
 He will dwell with them;  
 they will be his peoples,  
 and God himself will be with them;  
<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
 Death will be no more;  
 mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
 for the first things have passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

<sup>22</sup> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

- Revelation 21:1-7,22-25

When I was a toddler my parents divorced, which meant that I spent most of my weekdays with my mom Kathy Jean and I spent almost every weekend with my dad, Harold.

My dad was always the fun parent and my mom was the “let’s think critically” parent. Harold was kind of known for being wild and maybe even a little too much fun in his younger days. I heard all kinds of stories about him when I grew up, but as a kid he and my mom always had a way of balancing each other out. One summer, when I was 7, I broke my arm swinging on the monkey bar at the local park. The next weekend my dad came to pick me and before Kathy Jean would let me leave she made sure that he knew the protocol about broken bones and casts. I wasn’t supposed to do a lot with the arm and under no circumstances was I to go swimming or to get the cast wet.

We made it to Gainesville and were only there for about two hours when my dad popped out from behind the bushes and started spraying me with the water hose while I rode my bike up and down the drive way. The cast got wet and started to crumble the following week, but I hid it from mom and it still got the job done.

Dad lived in a small house in Gainesville, GA just up the road from Chicopee Village. Almost every weekend we'd play until we were both exhausted and at night we'd lie in bed and he would make shadow puppets on the wall. I did my best to contort my fingers the same way that he did, hoping that creatures on the wall that I made would look almost identical to his.

When I was about 9 years old dad developed a severe case of stomach ulcers. When he had an attack he would hunch over in pain. Sometimes a bit of Pepto-Bismol would do the trick, and other times the attacks would last for over an hour, causing him to groan and sweat profusely. When the attacks were that severe all he could do was sit in front of a box fan and wait for the pain to subside.

At the height of his illness, I can remember the stomach pains being so bad that they would wake him from his sleep. He would sneak out of bed and head for the medicine cabinet in search of some kind of relief. On occasion, I would wake up in the middle of the night, run my hand across the sheets and notice that he wasn't there. For some reason that always made me feel panicked and frightened.

It's a scary thing for a child to experience, to feel like you're all alone in the dark. Often times that's what the season of Advent feels like, like we've woken up only to realize that we are alone and surrounded by darkness. Perhaps that's because this time of year is when we experience the most darkness physically. After the autumn equinox the days get shorter and shorter. The sun comes up later in the morning and goes down earlier in evening.

Even so, most of us can agree that the darkness stretches beyond the physical. The season of Advent also brings with it the spiritual feelings of darkness, especially for those of who have experienced loss. It has a way of reminding us of the not yet. We've yet to experience Christ's second coming. We've yet to be reunited with our loved ones who have passed away. And we've yet to see the words from Revelation come to fruition. It hasn't happened, at least not yet.

John the Revelator paints a beautiful picture with the words that we just read. The passage tells us what it will be like when the "not yet" collides with the "right now". John says that on that day the old heaven and the old earth will pass away and a new heaven and a new earth will come to be. He says that on that day there will be no more pain, no more tears and no more mourning for lost loved one. He tells us that when these things come to pass that the gates of God's holy city will be opened and they will never close again. Best of all, John says that on that day there will no longer be a need for the sun or the moon because from then on the entire world be covered by the light of Christ.

John's words are stunning and elegant. They give us so much to look forward to. Even so, they are still hard to make sense of now, during the not yet. Maybe during the season of Advent all that we can do is rest assured that Jesus has already come once. He was born in the most humble and human way possible, a way that we can understand. And if we can just find hope in Jesus' first coming, then perhaps that will give us the faith and endurance we need to wait expectantly for his second coming, when all of the words from Revelation will come to fulfillment.

For those of us who feel like we are alone in the darkness during Advent, God points us to the light that grows within the womb of the Virgin Mary and in the softest of whispers God offers us one word “Emmanuel”, reminding us that there is light, that we are not alone and that He is indeed with us. Even in the darkness.

Whenever I would wake up at night and find that my dad was gone, that I was alone in the darkness. I would look up from the bed sheets and begin scanning the walls of the room. I’d look toward the bedroom door only to find that it was closed. I’d look toward the wall where the old mirrored chifferobe sat, and eventually my eyes would make it to the corner of the room where my dad kept an old 1970s club chair. It was then that I would see the small, but distinct orange glow of a Marlboro cigarette. Then I would cry out, “Dad.” And he would quietly call back saying, “Don’t worry, son. I’m here. Go back to sleep.”

Amen.