

Even So, Lord Jesus, Come Quickly

Colleagues, Last year's Christmas posting "Thoughts of a Manger" [ThTh 133] was the poem-prayer of my sister-in-law Linda Schroeder composed from the hospital bed where a hit-and-run driver had put her with a shattered leg and major internal injuries on Advent I. Now a year later Linda is still on crutches. The leg bones did not knit after eleven months of high-tech medical intervention. So a few weeks ago she had another surgery—artificial parts replacing the ones that did not heal. The prognosis is good, but patient waiting (ala the 2nd lesson for last Sunday, Advent III) is still part of her calling.

Analogous for this Christmas 2001 is today's text from Crossings-founder Bob Bertram. Bob was diagnosed in late summer with a brain tumor, glioblastoma by name. Chemo- and radiation-therapy interventions have had little effect in reducing the tumor. Words and prayers from the Christian koinonia—world-wide—continue, says Bob, to generate daily miracles. Large chunks of that koinonia showed up in the flesh two weeks ago at the annual Advent Hymn Festival here in St. Louis, this year honoring Bob. The worship theme was pure Bertramiana: "He's Coming! . . . And Aren't You Glad?" And so were the parts—six readings from Bob's theological works, each coupled with scriptural texts that gave the groundings.

In, with, and under these readings was the music: several choirs and music directors from area congregations, lots of unison singing. And then came the unprogrammed finale, Bob asking presiding pastor Ron Neustadt for space to say a few words before the benediction. It was *ex corde* and did get not

recorded. Here's the reconstruction we've made from several people's memories—including Bob's. *[A fuller treatment of this you-had-to-have-been-there moment comes in the Crossings Christmas newsletter in the mail this week.]*

“For an old brain-damaged Christian, especially someone who has had to learn all over again tonight that Advent is adventure, for such a one, there is really only one thing left to say. And that is simply, Come, Lord Jesus. And when You do come this time, why not bring along the whole family, all the sisters and brothers? For surely this time when You come, there will be room enough in the inn – the inn of our hearts – considering all the unfinished business that is still left to be done in those hearts.

For instance, when You come, Lord Jesus, think of what all will be there of ours for You to deal with. There will be all the clutter of what we have left there of ours – our sin, our sickness, our anxieties, our self-absorption, our complaints. You are welcome to all of those things. You promised us that You would assume all this as Your own. They look much better on You than they do on us.

We urge you, please to do just that. Make all that is ours Yours. And then what of all that is Yours, that You bring to our hearts? That, we urge you, dear Lord Christ, as you promised, to leave that for us to replace what You have taken away of ours. In place of our sin leave Your righteousness. In place of our anxiety and our joylessness, leave Your joy. In place of our dying, leave Your life and Your resurrection.

We know that it is not at all fair of us to ask for such an exchange. But how did we sing in the hymn a moment ago? “You make for us a great exchange.” “You bear upon Yourself our

frame, and in return, give us Your realm, Your glory and Your name." It is what Martin Luther called "the delightful exchange." The Old Testament prophet had said, we receive double for all our iniquities. Sisters and brothers, where can you find a better rate of exchange than that, double for all our iniquities? The great exchange.

And so when we say tonight, as we say in the program, "He's Coming . . . And Aren't You Glad?" Yes, we are glad, but we are glad not only for His coming as such, we are glad for His takings and His leavings. His taking what is ours and His leaving what is His, in its place. Speak of adventure! So meanwhile, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts with hope and with eagerness for Your coming, for Your takings and Your leavings. And make our hearts ready for Your coming and for the great exchange. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Lord Jesus, quickly come. This we ask in the name of the Great Exchanger, the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Eyes not yet moist were brought to tears by the choral piece immediately following Bob's. It was Paul Manz's classic "E'en so, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come." Tears mingled with the delight of that great exchange? Does that compute? For all of us present that evening, it did.

One departing worshipper commented: "It seemed to me that he gathered up all us strays, gathered us at the feet of the Heavenly Father and the Baby Jesus and said, 'If I'm coming home, I'm bringing all these people with me.'"

Another whispered the words of Richard Baxter, 17th century English Puritan: "I preached as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men." That may describe Bob the preacher, and thus our tears. For us receivers what he preached was delightful: "He's Coming and Yes, we are glad." Tears and

delight, This Delight, they do compute.

For your 12 days of Christmas—also amid the tears—count it all
joy.

Ed Schroeder