

Advent: Christ comes so the world may be shaken.

As we begin our journey into Advent Season, I would ask, before we rightly give our hearts over to the joy of Christmas; that we might take a few minutes in prayer over two brief passages, from the past about the meaning of Advent.

Here is the first. The great Lutheran Pastor and Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once preached, the following:

“We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God’s coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God’s coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the (Advent) message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us.”

Bonhoeffer spoke those words, from inside the heart of the Third Reich, a regime that finally killed him, for his resistance activities. He knew both the joy and the cost of the Christian faith, and he lived his discipleship heroically in very difficult times. His life makes for extraordinary reading, especially at the hands of a gifted biographer. Eric Metaxas has told Bonhoeffer’s story, in a most compelling book. I would urge you to read it.

But Bonhoeffer was not alone in his heroism, nor in preaching the real meaning of Advent, from the depths of a dark time. The second (longer) passage is by Jesuit Father Alfred Delp; who wrote the words below, from his prison cell shortly before the Third Reich executed him—just as it did Dietrich Bonhoeffer—for resistance to Adolph Hitler’s regime.

“We may ask why God has sent us into this time, why he has sent this whirlwind over the earth, why he keeps us in this chaos where all appears hopeless and dark, and why there seems to be no end to this in sight. The answer to this question is perhaps that we were living on earth in an utterly false and counterfeit security. And now God strikes the earth till it resounds, now he shakes and shatters; not to pound us with fear, but to teach us one thing—the spirit’s innermost moving and being moved . . .”

“(We) have stood on this earth in false pathos, in false security; in our spiritual insanity we really believed we could, with the power of our own hand and arm, bring the stars down from heaven and kindle flames of eternity in the world. We believed that with our own forces we could avert the dangers and banish night, switch off and halt the internal quaking of the universe. We believed we could harness everything and fit it into a final order that would stand.”

“Here is the message of Advent: Faced with him who is the Last, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to false securities will our eyes be able to see this Last One and get to the bottom of things. Only then will we be able to guard our life from the frights and terrors into which God the Lord has let the world sink to teach us, so that we may awaken from sleep, as Paul says, and see that it is time to repent, time to change things”

“The world today needs people who have been shaken by ultimate calamities and emerged from them with the knowledge and awareness that those who look to the Lord will still be preserved by him, even if they are hounded from the earth. The Advent message comes out of an encounter of man with the absolute, the final, the Gospel. It is thus the message that shakes—so that in the end, the world shall be shaken.”

These are sober thoughts. But they are the soil, from which real Christian joy and hope must grow. They remind us why Advent, as a season, is so vital to understanding the whole of Christian revelation. The baby born in Bethlehem comes to bring us light and peace. But to do that, He comes to die for us and rise again. He comes to deliver us from the evil in ourselves and in the world that slew Bonhoeffer, and Delp, and even the Son of God Himself.

May you have peaceful and quiet Advent, as you make room in your hearts, to receive the Blessed Christ-child. O come Emmanuel! Jesus Christ comes to shake everything. May He come quickly

Blessings, M✠