

We have a wonderful series of paradoxes in our Psalm for today.

In Psalm 85, the psalmist alternates, almost unconsciously, between celebrating what God has already done, and looking forward to what God will do in the future. And the lines are a little blurry between present and future. It celebrates what is here already and what is not yet here.

*9 Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you,
that your glory may dwell in our land.*

*10 Mercy and truth have met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

*11 Truth shall spring up from the earth,
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.*

So which is it? Are these things that have happened? Or are they things that will happen? In Psalm 85 the answer is "Yes." They are both already and not yet.

One of the most difficult paradoxes of the Christian life is the paradox of already and not yet.

Jesus has come. He was born as a baby in Bethlehem. He lived among us. He died and was raised. He ascended into heaven. And one day, he will return.

We proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

And we live our lives "in between"—we occupy the space between "Christ is risen" and "Christ will come again." It's not always easy for us to live in the midst of this paradox. And yet that's exactly where we dwell. We live our lives in between Christ's first coming, his first Advent, and his return, his second Advent. In a real way all of our Christian lives are in a state of perpetual Advent: watching and waiting and hoping and preparing.

Jesus has already won the victory over the powers of evil and death. And yet evil and death are still present realities in our world.

Jesus has been raised to new and resurrected life. He promises us the same life. And yet we have to still live in a world of disease, and suffering, and death.

This is not always an easy place for us to live spiritually. In the world of already but not yet.

It's like waiting for someone to return a phone call. You might have a pretty good idea of what they're going to say. You might have contingency plans waiting to go. But you really don't know for sure until you actually get a response. And so you have to wait.

The late great Tom Petty sang about this in his song, "The Waiting."

The chorus goes,
The waiting is the hardest part
Every day you see one more card
You take it on faith, you take it to the heart
The waiting is the hardest part

Yes, as Tom Petty sings, the waiting is hard. And you have to take things on faith. You have to trust that there will be a good outcome.

In the Second World War, the war in Europe took a decisive turn with the D-Day invasions of June 1944. D-Day was the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. And yet, victory wouldn't come in Europe for almost another year. There were 11 months and 4 days in between the Allies landing on the beaches of Normandy and final victory being declared in Europe.

D-Day was decisive. D-Day changed the direction of the war. But there were still a number of battles that had to be fought before final victory was achieved.

That's where we live our Christian lives, in a perpetual Advent state of watching, waiting, and preparing. The first Advent, the first coming has happened. But we're awaiting the second coming, when all will be made right.

In two-and-a-half weeks we will be celebrating again Jesus' first coming in our Christmas celebrations. And yet, we'll still be waiting for God to set everything right when Jesus comes again. We'll be waiting for that time when pain and suffering and death and evil will finally be eliminated; that time when we will be able to live in new and unending life.

Death has been decisively defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And yet we still have to live with the reality of death until we also share in the fulness of Christ's resurrection ourselves.

This is always the reality we live with. But it's especially apparent to us in 2020. This is a huge part of our reality right now with the COVID pandemic.

We've been dealing with COVID for most of the year. Folks we know have suffered from this disease, and some have died.

And yet, paradoxically, we live with hope. Yes, the pandemic is raging right now. It's the worst that it's been. And yet, we have several vaccines that are coming. These vaccines are basically here now, but they have not yet been distributed widely. That is coming. But it will take many months to get the vaccine administered to the bulk of our population. So we see light at the end of the tunnel. But at the same time, we also continue to slog through very dark times.

That's where we live in our troubled world. But we also live as people of faith and hope and love as we wait for God to come again.

As Tom Petty sings,
The waiting is the hardest part

But as he also sings,
You take it on faith, you take it to the heart

In the midst of a very dark night, we are looking forward to the dawn. Hold onto that hope.

Jesus' light already shines in the darkness. That darkness can never overpower it.