

7 Easter Yr C, 8/05/2016  
Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21  
Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“Marana-tha—Our Lord, come!”

I don't know if you noticed it while I was reading our passage from Revelation—the words “coming” and “come” are mentioned 6 times. That got me curious about how many times the word come is mentioned in the Bible. So I did a search, and here is what I discovered: In the NRSV translation, the word come appears 1193 times in the OT, and 538 times in the NT. In Revelation it appears 43 times. So, if you add both the OT and NT numbers, the word come then is mentioned 1731 times—that's quite a lot. In the OT references, many of them are a word of encouragement, exhorting the people of God to worship and serve the LORD. In the NT references, many of them are in the form of prayer, longing for Jesus to come. According to some NT scholars, the apostle Paul, in the Aramaic language, mentions the earliest form of this prayer, it is *Marana-tha*, “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22)

The prayer is an interesting one, since Jesus had already come as the Incarnate One, born as a human being, and he lived and died as a human being. So in that sense, Jesus had already come. However, Jesus himself spoke of his coming again after he died. Here in our Revelation passage, Jesus twice speaks of his imminent coming again. In verse twelve, he says: “See, I am coming soon,” and in verse twenty, he says: “Surely I am coming soon.” So that is the promise Jesus made to the early church, and along with that promise the early Christians had the expectation that Jesus would come soon. Many of them most likely thought that Jesus would come again in their lifetime.

That he *did* come creates the expectation that he *will* come. It is like that with every kind of waiting. Expectancy is predicated on experience. Without the experience we would not know what to expect or why to expect it. Imagine you are waiting for a letter day after day, and say, “How I wish that

it would come!” You can only expect it because you have some idea whom it will come from, what it will contain, and why it will be coming at this time. And that idea is formed by what you know already, of the writer, the subject and the circumstances, for otherwise you could not expect anything. So it is with the coming of Christ. The expectancy with which we pray “Come!” springs from his having come.<sup>1</sup>

The expectation of Jesus coming again however has proven to be problematic, since it has led people to predict the end-times. Down through the centuries, it seems that there have always been Christians who have expected Christ to come in their day—so they predicted when he would come. Moreover, they often predicted the circumstances that would usher in his coming. Even to this day, there have been and still are people who have twisted, perverted and misinterpreted the Bible so that some people believe and expect Christ’s second coming whenever: a comet appears, or an earthquake strikes, or a volcano erupts, or a war begins, or the stock market falls, and so on. All of these things have happened and continue to happen; yet Jesus still has not come again. Many of you, like I, can probably recall that just before the year 2000 and in the year 2000 there were several folks who predicted Jesus’ second coming. Such predictions continue even to this day. Those who make such predictions seem to have forgotten that Jesus said not even he knows the day or hour when the end will come—only God the Father knows.

So then, what are we to make of Jesus’ words in our Revelation passage today, when Jesus says: “See, I am coming soon,” and “Surely I am coming soon?” It is now over 2000 years since Jesus spoke those words, so obviously we cannot take those words literally. Rather, the words, and the whole Book of Revelation are most likely best understood if we take them symbolically. For example, the word “soon” might be taken symbolically in light of what is said elsewhere in the Bible concerning the concept of time, as in Psalm 90:4 where we learn that: “For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday

when it is past, or like a watch in the night,” and in 2 Peter 3:8 which states that: “With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” In this symbolic sense over two thousand years may be understood as “soon.”

I think there are other ways in which we can understand Jesus coming soon too. For example, Jesus comes soon whenever two or more gather together for worship in his name, as he promised. Jesus comes soon when we call upon him to be near us and communicate with him by means of prayer. Jesus comes soon through the preached word every Sunday and throughout the week when that word bears fruit in living out our faith each day. Jesus comes soon whenever we celebrate the sacrament of baptism and he claims that newly baptized person as a member of the family of God through means of water and the word. Jesus comes soon whenever we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and he is present with us through the word and the means of bread and wine, as well as when we pray the prayer: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

If we understand and interpret Christ’s coming soon in this symbolic way, we need not live in fear or dread. It is not given to us to know the day or hour or exact circumstances of the end-times. Our passage reminds us that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. If that is the case, then he is in control of the past, present and future. He will bring all history into a completion at the time of consummation.

In the Greek, the word “end” does not mean only a final point in time; it also means goal, fulfillment, perfection and eternity. Christ is all of these for us. We shall share in his eternal life. In a world of “shifting sands,” where power and authority are so easily abused; where there is little completeness, fulfillment and perfection; Jesus Christ promises to fulfill our longings and be our true security—come what may.

If that is true, and I believe that it is, then I think it is very appropriate for the writer of Revelation to end with these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.” Grace—God’s unconditional love and

acceptance for you, for me, and for everyone. Grace that saves us now so that we can truly live a full and meaningful life, trusting that God knows what God is doing. Grace that is sufficient even when we fail and make huge mistakes in our life—Jesus still comes to us to forgive us and give us a fresh, new beginning. Grace that sustains us when the going is tough and we face what seem to be insurmountable obstacles; yet Jesus is there with us and we are able to cope with the challenges of life. Grace that is poured out to us so plentifully that we have the deepest desire to respond by loving God and serving our neighbour—especially the neighbour in greatest need. Grace that, in God’s perfect timing, he shall call us to our eternal home to live with all the saints. Amen.

1 Oliver O’Donovan, *The Word in Small Boats: Sermons from Oxford* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), p. 54.