

The Hope of Christmas Future: Death Defying Acts
Revelation 1:4, Luke4:18-19, Romans 8, selected verses
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It's always a little amazing when sports analysts try to predict the outcome of a sporting event. But they look at talent levels, statistics of team achievements, and coaching trends; but at the end of the day, guessing the winner is simply that – a guess. Especially with this season's Minnesota Vikings – you never know what the outcome is going to be. As far as we have come with technology, the future is something we still cannot control. The future is unknown, terribly unpredictable, and awaiting us all. Some things we do know, or we at least expect. We know that we will not live forever upon the earth. We expect the sun to rise every morning and slip below the horizon every night. There are small constants in our everyday lives, and then there are the larger variables: *Will I find someone to marry? Will I get the job I'm hoping for? Will the test results say all is well? Will I have enough money to retire?*

The disciples asked Jesus to offer them clues about the future. Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed...all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs" Matthew 24:6-8. Jesus talked about wars, famines, and earthquakes, but most curiously, Jesus said, "See that you are not alarmed." How can Jesus ask us not to be alarmed about the future? Scrooge was certainly alarmed at what the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come has to show him, but perhaps we can see in his bleak future some hope for us all.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is a shrouded, silent spirit, and Scrooge becomes uneasy and fearful when his questions of the spirit elicit only an ominous pointing finger from the specter. Silence is uncomfortable, isn't it? Have you ever experienced that awkward four-second silence at the end of a group conversation? At best the conversation is just over, and at worst someone has said something inappropriate and the group is rather stunned. Maybe you've experienced the silences as the result of gossip gone wrong. Maybe you've experienced the silence that expresses shock or

disbelief, such as experiencing bad behavior from your child during church or a large gathering, or the silence that follows news you wish were untrue.

Sometimes silence is unnerving when we are in desperate need of an answer. When we pray to God and “hear” nothing in response, sometimes it leaves us with an uncomfortable and uneasy feeling that God has turned away or that God cannot be bothered with our requests. I have come to realize that silence is what it sounds like when **God is listening**. It's not that prayers go unanswered; rather the silence is God's invitation for us to continue speaking. Silence can be punishment. It can be apathy. It can be the space between awe and disbelief. But silence can also be invitation. It can be as simple as truly listening to someone who has something to say. It can be as profound as Christ's silence before Pilate, which invited humanity into the redeeming suffering of the cross.

When Scrooge hears no answer from the spirit, he becomes fearful. Does the word of God seem silent in your heart? Are you caught in a place where your eyes cannot see what tomorrow may bring? Our future may be unknown, but God knows us and will hold us. “I will let you find me,” says the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah. If you are hungry for the light of God, put yourself in a position to hear it. Christ calls us to go out and serve those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, those who are in despair, those who are in need of shelter. Christ doesn't call us to provide just a handout. Christ calls us to be with the lowly because it is where Christ is and Christ is inviting us to dwell with him. If you are hungry for the light of Christ, then go to where Christ is. God will be there, and if you hear the sound of silence, speak, because God is listening.

By the end of *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge has had his eyes opened and makes the decision to change his ways and therefore change his life. And he has become “unbound” so to speak. He has not been given a new day just in order to make amends; rather he has been given a new day in order to experience an unbound joy. Through his lack of compassion and empathy, Scrooge has become a shell of a person. He has forgotten who he was.

Perhaps Scrooge was meant to remind us of the heart of Luke 15, and the heart of the gospel itself: the lost sheep did not find its way back into the fold; rather it was found. The lost coin did not jump back into the woman's

purse. She searched for it. The prodigal son did not earn his way back into his father's house. The father embraced his return. In all three parables, the community is asked to do one thing – **rejoice**. Rejoice with me that the sheep is found. Rejoice with me that the coin is found. Rejoice with me that my son, who was dead, is alive. Our job in the story is to rejoice over what God is doing in person of Christ. "I bring good news to you – wonderful, joyous news for all the people," the angel said to the shepherds in Luke 2. When we find joy – the steadfast assurance that God is with us, we will recognize the redemption the Christ Child was born to offer, and we will celebrate Scrooge's rebirth rather than remember his faults. As Christians we are to live unbound lives, Christ came that we might have life and have it abundantly. So whether we are more like Scrooge than we care to admit, God offers us a new day. I pray today that you might see that this new day begins today.

**The miracle has just begun in YOU for the sake of the world...
God bless us every one!**

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We begin our scripture readings with an ancient greeting.

Revelation 1:4

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

Jesus shares these words with the crowd as he reads scripture in the temple.

Luke 4:18-19

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And finally from Paul we have an explanation of our place in God's family that comes not with a Spirit of fear, but with a Spirit of belonging.

Romans 8, selected verses

So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. All who are led by God's Spirit are God's offspring. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as God's children.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of these holy words.