

Brian Grogan SJ

2. DO I REALLY MATTER TO YOU?

Dear Lord, recently I read of someone who felt that other people's profiles were drawn in colour with magic markers, but that hers was sketched only in light pencil. I sometimes feel like that woman, almost invisible, unimportant. But am I missing something rich that is hidden in my life? Psychologists say that to become truly alive we need the loving gaze of another. Good parents across the world are the first to provide this loving gaze: it is steady, unwavering, and it lasts into eternity, whether we are aware of it or not. The friends and good people in our lives also help us to believe that we really matter. A loving gaze is followed by loving care.

All such people are Advent people for me, because Advent means that your love is continuously on its way to me. These escorts of your loving care hint to me that I am securely held in your love, that I do matter to you. Help me to catch on to this treasure; that I am good, worthwhile, lovable and wonderful. I am the apple of your eye and you have limitless dreams for me. *'You have made me little less than the angels, and crowned me with glory and honour. My name is written on the palms of your hands'* (Psalm 8:5: Isaiah 49:16). Let me live out of this deep-down mystery: let me be happy about myself, even if I go unnoticed by others. And also let me experience the joy of being an Advent person to those around me, and to all of your Creation!

1. THE DIVINE STORY

Dear God, I'm writing this with the memory of a London tower block that was gutted by fire. Hundreds endured smoke and fumes and some were burnt beyond recognition. Such a tragedy. And yet this is the world into which you make your quiet Advent, moment by moment, year by year. Your beloved Son endured as we do the pain of human life, and it cost him not less than everything. He endured the depth of human malice, but his love transformed it. The Gospel story reveals an astonishing expanse of love that encompasses our story of sin and evil, suffering and death. We are told that you *'so loved the world as to send your Son to save it'* (John 3:16). This was your Advent.

I can then imagine Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the outer edges of a great jigsaw: the inside pieces are the jumbled history of the world. Of course I can't yet see how most pieces can be fitted in: many of them, like the tower block, are twisted and distorted. Earth too is disfigured and wounded. But the outline of the jigsaw remains firm: because you love us limitlessly you defeat evil at a radical level. The tragedies of human life and of our Planet are being transformed into a new epic story, and in your good time we will be shown how you manage to make a masterpiece out of the mess [we present to you](#). [Strengthen this Advent hope in me.](#)

2. MY LOVE STORY

Lord, is each of us a book telling the story of your love? Is mine a love-story too, in all its downs and ups, its shadows and its light-filled times? I think of my story as pretty ordinary, hardly a best-seller! My image of myself is of someone who has plodded along quietly; nothing very dramatic or unmissable seems to have happened. No publisher would want my manuscript—it wouldn't sell.

But if I catch on to the fact that you co-author my story, everything suddenly changes. Is this what your Advent is really about? If you are steadily working on me deep down, to make me grow in love and so to become like you, then I can look back on the chapters of my life with new interest. There I'll see what you—my unobtrusive ghost-writer—have been up to over many years. 'My story' is more truly 'our story': you and I create it together. Our story-line is rich, not matter for a paperback now but the makings of an epic, worthy of a special edition with gold lettering.

Each of us has our own secret scripture: life gets exciting when I view people like this and try to spot your hand on their messy pages as on my own. '*When Christ who is our life is revealed, then we also will be revealed with him in glory*' (Colossians 3:4). Is each of us then a chapter in the love-story of the cosmos? Wow!

3. HOW MANY DAYS TO CHRISTMAS?

Lord, for us human beings life is spread out over time; it comes to us bit by bit. Perhaps we couldn't cope if we had it altogether at once: we'd be overwhelmed, because we cannot bear too much reality.

But you are different: you have your act completely together! You are always turned towards the world; you have only one loving plan for our good. Your plan is eternal, always in operation, and it over-arches and catches into itself all the events that make up human history. So your Advent is eternal, steady, though we experience its stages only moment by moment. So we speak of the four Sundays of Advent; they come one after another and lead up to Christmas. Children count the days till the Christ-child is born. But you have always been infinitely for us, and always will be. So while it is right for us to celebrate this Feast every year as best we can, we don't need to imagine that your love for us is growing only slowly, year on year. Instead the Feast of Christmas reveals over and over the truth of your unending goodness to us and to all Creation. Because you became *flesh*, you are showing us that *all* creation is holy and always has been, because human flesh is sustained by air and earth and chemicals and sunshine and water. '*The Word became flesh*' (John 1:14), so not only we but the whole Earth community can rejoice at Christmas and celebrate the Feast.

