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Is. 1/Heb. 11
“I Wonder”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

We all wonder what the world we live in will be like in the future.

Will our cars drive themselves? When we go out to eat, will the waiters in restaurants be robots? Will our packages be delivered by drones?

If you're thinking that churches won't be affected by technology, I can tell you that there are already computer-driven programs that can play hymns and choir anthems during a church service. If a church decides to dispense with its organist and choir, there's a machine that's available to replace them!

(Don't worry, David. We have no plans to buy one of these machines!)

As individuals, too, we may wonder what our personal lives will be like in the future. What will be the next step in your career? Who will your friends be, ten years from now? Will you have enough money to live comfortably?

One of today's alternative Lessons, which we didn't have time to have read this morning, invites us to wonder about the future. In a passage from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord is complaining about the people of Israel's lack of faithfulness and their inability to do the good works they should do.

But then God says to Isaiah, “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord:

 though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
 though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

 If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land...”

In other words, God is saying that it's perfectly all right to wonder what is going to happen in your life. It is even all right to question what *God* seems to be doing in your life.

“Come let us argue it out, says the Lord.”

God wants us to ask questions, so that we can see ourselves as we really are in the world around us, as it really is. That's how we learn what God is calling us to do.

Especially if you are at a crossroad in your spiritual journey, you are encouraged by God himself to “argue it out.”

Take your case to the highest court in the universe. Try to see more clearly what the future holds for you. Having a dialogue with God allows you to discover new ways to live a fulfilling life.

It's helpful to remember that this need to see our lives better is always going to be with us. To be intellectually free, we always need options—and in order for us to have these options, the future has to be uncertain. An undetermined future guarantees our freedom.

And that is why Christians also need the virtue of *hope*. We need to be able to trust in the future that God has for us; we need to be able to hope that some good will come out of it. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us in today's First Lesson, “...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

This is a perfect text for Christians who are worrying about their future! Even when we are uncertain what tomorrow will bring, our faith gives us an “assurance” that our hopes for the days to come won't be in vain.

We see, then, that the mere act of wondering is good for us. Our current reading for the Incarnation Book Club is *The Guest Book*, a novel which was written by Sarah Blake.

Some of the characters in the book were born in the early years of the twentieth century. As a result, their language reflects that historical period.

At one point in the novel, a businessman is sitting in his office. As he is pondering various personal issues, his 22-year-old son knocks on his door. The son apologizes for the interruption, but the father says, “It’s all right. I was just *woolgathering*.”

“Woolgathering” here means that the man was brooding--ruminating about things that were floating around his head. “Woolgathering” once literally referred to the act of gathering loose tufts of wool that had gotten caught on bushes and fences as sheep passed by.

Woolgatherers must have seemed to go all over the place, gaining little for their efforts, for in the mid-16th century "woolgathering" began to mean, "my mind went wandering aimlessly."

People today might profit from some mental wandering. Instead of filling up our heads all the time with music or podcasts, or TV, we might do better to leave our minds empty and let thoughts come to us on their own. Some of those thoughts might even arrive from the Holy Spirit!

This is one of the purposes of the ancient Christian practice of *meditation*. Monks and nuns, for example, have regular times during their day when they sit in silence. They might meditate on a theme such as God’s love, or they could consider some event in the life of Christ, such as his suffering.

While they are meditating, the monks and nuns find that insights come into their heads. They also discover that problems that once caused them great stress become better understood, and ultimately become less stressful.

We may still get impatient when we aren’t sure what is happening in areas of our lives. In some cases, we would do well to follow the Prophet Isaiah’s advice and “argue out” the issue with God.

But we would also do well to let our minds do some wandering. Wandering--and *wondering*.

If you have ever had the chance to lie on a hammock during a lazy summer afternoon, you’ll know that the prime benefit of that experience isn’t the physical rest but the mental rejuvenation. When you watch the clouds go by and let the wool gather, your mind is refreshed.

Of course, we all eventually need to return to the real world of technology. Today’s powerful computers and other devices have changed our lives immeasurably, and they will doubtless change our lives even more in the future.

But we can choose to face this reality and look on the bright side and take precautions against letting machines have power over us. That’s better than letting ourselves be beset by pessimism that the world is going to hell!

Clearly the latter negative attitude doesn’t express *Christian hope*! Nor, as we have seen, does it express Christian faith.

So in these gloomy, combative times, hope has become a necessary Christian virtue! As God’s children, we need—as the Bible says--“to testify to the hope that is in us.”

Now here is the difference between wondering and worrying: worrying relies just on ourselves, while wondering includes an element of hope.

Worrying puts all the burden on you. Wondering assumes that God is already at work in your life, and the burden doesn’t only rest on your shoulders.

Wondering about God—even arguing with God—puts God into the equation. All the more reason then, when you find yourself woolgathering, to let God into your thoughts!

Amen.