

The former cringing

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In [my Century lectionary column for this week](#), I focused on the reading from Isaiah 65. It's a text I find baffling, frustrating and hopeful. If space were limitless, here are some other things I might have included:

- ◦ It's tempting to live in the future instead of now—not just for individuals but also for communities. In the church, we have a tendency to lean too far forward and wring our hands: What's going to happen? What will the church look like in 20 or 50 years? This [Tom Long Century column from last year](#) is an excellent warning against "futuring"—and a challenge to stand sturdily in faith and wonderment at what God is doing/going to do through us.
- ◦ I find John 14:17 hopeful and helpful in considering the already/not yet nature of God's promise for all people: "You already know. The Spirit is with you and the Spirit is in you."
- ◦ Here's a great quote from the film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*:
"Everything will be all right in the end. If it's not all right, it is not yet the end." Yes, this might seem to give us permission to sit on our hands and wait for somebody else (God) to fix everything. For most of us, however, our problem is misaligned anxiety—failing to trust that God will be God.

- - In a former congregation years ago, my colleague Jeannie and I started a small group for young moms. We were talking about Lenten disciplines, and Jeannie announced one of hers: “I want to give up ‘cringing.’” Jeannie confessed her habit of lying awake at night, replaying what she feared were missteps in conversations, or ways she may have disappointed this or that person or embarrassed herself in such-and-such a meeting. The group lit up with recognition, laughter and lots of “me too!” comments. Jeannie had given a name for a bad habit so many of us have. But in Isaiah we hear that “the former things” will not be remembered. God frees us from the fruitless struggle of trying to control the things (and people) we cannot control. We are freed to participate in God’s intention for the world: the reign of true and deep justice.