

Isaiah 46:9-10 - "Remember the former things of old; for I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times, saying, 'My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

Do you like surprises? I tend to prefer things on an even keel, as most of us do. Yet they are often the spice of life. On a recent, lengthy overseas trip, I was settling into my assigned seat in coach, rubbing elbows with my seatmate as I mentally geared up for a long winter's night, when a flight attendant suddenly materialized out of nowhere. "Get your things together," she said. "We have a seat for you in the front." Nice. Very.

Whether you like them or not, life is full of surprises - some good, some not so much. I think of the biblical figure of Moses, coming across a burning bush while tending sheep in the wilderness, and hearing the voice of God say, "Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground." Did Moses jump for joy? No, he hid his face, for he was afraid of God.

Or what about Mary, the mother of Jesus, when the angel Gabriel visited her one day in Nazareth, saying, "Greetings, O favored one; the Lord is with you." This bewildered young, unmarried teenager was troubled, wondering what kind of news this announcement might portend. This might rank as the number one surprise of all time, hearing that she was chosen to conceive and bear the Son of God. Yet Mary chose to respond, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

In all of life's events, including those things we call surprises, God knows the end from the beginning. The One who created us also sustains us, going before us to prepare the way and following behind to protect us. He counsels us to remember the things of the past, to take into consideration the things of old, so that we will have confidence to know that He is with us, working in all circumstances to accomplish His good purpose.

I, like most of us, have also been the recipient of surprises that forever altered the landscape of life as I knew it. "I'm afraid you have cancer" certainly ranked in that category. Twice. The first time, my reaction was like that of Moses; I wanted to hide in fear. But the second time around, I remembered God's faithfulness and chose to respond more like Mary. "I am yours, Lord, and I choose to trust in you."

God knows the end from the beginning and His promise is to be with us through it all, to never leave or forsake us. Today, no matter your circumstances, remember that He promises to work all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. That's all things, without exception. For He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Emmanuel, God with us.