

“Days Are Surely Coming”

Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Nov. 29, 2015 -- 1st Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. {15} In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. {16} In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? {10} Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. {11} Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. {12} And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. {13} And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. {26} People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. {27} Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. {28} Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." {29} Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; {30} as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. {31} So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. {32} Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. {33} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. {34} "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, {35} like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. {36} Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

I'll start today with a confession. I alluded to it last night at our Advent Supper and program and I think it's something you've all know for some time now. You're looking at an Advent purist. I admit that sometimes during Advent I am somewhat of a Grinch. I like to sing at least one verse of "O come, O Come Emmanuel" before Frosty and Rudolf and the elves take over. Can we please have some purple and hang some greens before the assault of glaring red and the blue white of the L.E.D.'s rule the day?

And yet, you say, already today we've sung the quintessential Christmas Hymn, Joy to the World. But I would respectfully point out that it isn't a Christmas hymn at all – it's a hymn of Advent – of Advent hope, expectation and preparation. Joy to the world! the Lord is come: Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing. Joy to the world! the Savior reigns: not will reign when he grows up, reigns now -- Let us our songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains Repeat the sounding joy. Advent is, a time to prepare ourselves, our spiritual selves for Christ to come so the hymnist writes, No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found. And finally a verse for our king who is yet to come, a true verse of hope, He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love. Now that will be a great day.

Even with that being said it is hard be immune to the first jingling bell of the Salvation Army ringer, which brings the first tingle of anticipatory excitement, that reminds me that as we experience the first glimmer of Advent recognition that we, all of us, are getting ready, we are doing all we do, whether we know it or not, because we have a mightily anticipated, super special, world changing, hope giving, guest on the way. And as we heard as we lit this candle of hope this morning, our hope is God doing a new thing. God, if we allow it, will allow us to help a righteous branch of hope spring forth in our souls once again.

Advent has a purpose. Advent is getting us ready. In the church we quickly say good bye to the old church year, give a passing tip of the hat to Thanksgiving and Stewardship and Christ the King and move on. Quickly. 27 Days of Advent quickly.

What was it Jesus said? “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with... the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place.”

“Being ready and alert for something about to happen” is an enduring theme of Advent. Having our hearts and minds open to the coming of the Lord is what this four weeks of preparation is all about. We look for heralds of

hope in a world that has great difficulty finding signs to point to anything hopeful, maybe especially to the one who comes in Advent glory. So each year we must create and recreate our own signs. Ours is a world in such desperate need of some encouragement, of some sure sign of better, happier, safer, more peaceful times to come that we pin our hopes on many things. Many things that give the illusion of hopefulness.

Economist wait with baited breath, as eager as eight year olds who've asked Santa for a new bike, for the news that will spell bloom or gloom for the economy. The reports are in: OH, no, In 2018, retail store sales fell as much as 9 percent from 2017. We want signs that tell us, is the sap rising in the fig tree? Will new growth be evident or not? Wait, wait there's a glimmer of hope -- Online sales for Wednesday through Black Friday was 26 percent higher than in 2017. Oh, happy day! Really? Tell the truth. Does that make you feel 'hopeful?' Is it really a sign of anything more than our nations insatiable desire for more stuff. More things we believe will make us happy. More sales to make us secure?

Paul tells the church in Thessalonica that what matters most is what God can do inside of us. In anticipation of Christ imminent return and he says, And may {GOD} so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

What we do in Advent is not just going through motions to make the place pretty. It is indeed, getting the church house ready for the one who comes to us. It's about getting ourselves, mind, heart and spirit ready on the inside to make things look welcoming to our coming guest on the outside.

It's all about the birth of hope. And how you get ready for that hope to come. And Jesus knows that as much as that hope is marked by external signs, what is most important is what is happening on the inside. Jesus points to a single fig tree which is capable of rightly expressing interior changes. Deep in its roots and heart, the rising sap of spring brings forth sprouts and leaves, decorating the tree with the lush greenery of new life. Jeremiah also uses this language of exterior regeneration to symbolize interior changes when he describes the new righteous branch which will "spring up" from David's line. Advent is a pregnant time like an expectant mom who swells externally with the internal promise of a new life, parents do far more than paint a nursery and set up a crib. That 9 month advent is all about preparing hearts, about increasing capacity to hope and love the child who comes. It's about hearts near bursting with anticipation and a flush of emotion upon seeing the baby hidden away until the moment of birth.

All around us there are springing up signs of hope from blow up Santa's to magnificent Christmas trees. There is music to be heard from Jingle Bells to The Messiah to old Nat King Cole singing about chestnuts roasting on an

open fire. There are programs and concerts and parties and wonderful worship and all of it helps us to be ready on the inside for the one who comes to us. For the hope that is born to us anew **and** once again in the living Son of God. For the babe of Bethlehem and the return of the savior. Let's have ourselves a merry little Christmas – but let's use this Advent to build the excitement, the anticipation, the hope, peace, joy and love that he brings. The clarion call is here in this place so that it can be here, once again, in our hearts: **Hark! A THRILLING VOICE IS SOUNDING!! “Christ is nigh!” we hear it say. Cast aside the works of darkness, O ye children of the day!”**

It is why, even with all that is happening around us this day we pause in the decoration of this place -- even as we take in its beauty -- we pause to take him in -- in word and sacrament -- so to the table we come -- the table that reminds us he is always and ever here....

And rather than we being ones inviting...he invites us...it is his house we decorate-- his birth we anticipate-- his saving grace that reminds us and bids us -- come, come and experience my gracein bread and in cup....