

## “Those Days and That Time”

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church  
Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36  
November 28, 2021  
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There may be no greater mismatch between American cultural Christianity and the outside-of-time-and-geography Lord Jesus Christ than last Friday and this Sunday. Between Black Friday and the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent. Between Christmas shopping sale alerts that pinged at me all day, while I was writing this sermon, and the cosmic Second Coming of Jesus Christ in today's scripture,

Where the heavens will shake... not from the number of people trying to enter a door at Target at the same time, and people will faint... not from the best prices of the season, but from the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Far from a cultural war on Christmas, we are inundated with a version of the “season” that is very far from the “reason” and it is nearly impossible to extricate yourself from it, despite our ability to buy thousands of products that say “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Or maybe, actually, it's because of that.

Which is why we need the scriptures for Advent 1 every year, no matter which year of the lectionary we are in, and we have just begun C, the year focused on Luke's gospel. We begin with an apocalyptic vision, an eschatological, or end time focused, discourse from Jesus. Pastor Layne helped us understand the meaning of apocalypse in her sermon last Sunday, that it is an unveiling of truth that cannot be seen with human eyes or understood with the human mind. They involve a future justice and righteousness that is promised, but not experienced yet. An ultimate defeat of evil, for everything that counters the justice and righteousness of God should be named for what it is.

It is about days that are coming, in those days from Jeremiah, in that day from Luke, and these things we will witness when it comes, justice and righteousness in the land, salvation and safety, the kingdom of God, redemption drawing near. The word Advent is a Latin translation of the Greek word *Parousia*, which means Second Coming. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, Roman Christians connected an Advent season with *Second* coming of Christ; it wasn't until another 1,000 years, in the Middle Ages, when Advent became connected to Jesus' first coming as a baby in a manger. The Advent 1 scriptures keep us in line with 1,000 years of spiritual practice. 1,000 years of looking to the Second Coming to 1. recalibrate our focus, 2. find hope amidst the powerful forces of empire, and 3. to recommit ourselves to our work in bringing God's kingdom ever nearer.

The theologian Stephanie Paulsell describes the gift of Advent like this:

“God never tires of offering us the opportunity to begin again.  
Advent reminds us that the kingdom that has “come near,”  
is not like a train we either catch on its way through town or miss forever.  
The kingdom of heaven is more like a comet that blazes regularly into view,

lighting up the sky and taking our breath away.” (12/1/09 *Christian Century* article on “Keeping Awake”)

We don’t get just one chance to orient our lives towards Jesus, to focus our actions and attitudes on his way, we will never miss that boat. But we will spend our entire lives living out our faith in the reality of time while the God who exists outside of time seeks our attention. And gets it, sometimes by a moment of overwhelming majesty of God’s presence, like a comet blazing in the sky. Or maybe sometimes in an Advent wake-up call, to be on guard and alert, that this day in the world and whatever our current concerns are in it, (as important as they are to us and to God) is just a barely visible dot on a tapestry big enough to fill this room. When our most pressing concern today passes, and when we pass away, and even the heavens and the earth pass away, the words of the Word, the Son of Man, Jesus our Lord, *will always be*.

We are warned here in Luke against allowing the heaviness of our hearts to draw us too far inward, same Greek word here for hearts weighed down, as the word for the heaviness of the disciples’ eyelids that almost made them sleep through another cosmic moment of Jesus – his transfiguration earlier in Luke’s gospel. Our posture in Advent is not of huddled shoulders, sleepy eyelids, drawn in body, but one of standing up, heads raised, eyes fixed, in the direction of our redemption.

We can’t find hope, in the face of any definition of the word empire, if we are not first focused in the right direction to find it. So we recalibrate and then we seek hope in our present context: the prophet Jeremiah spoke a word of hope against the oppression of the Babylonian empire; Jesus spoke words of hope against the oppression of the Roman empire, and this year our Advent theme asks us to consider what words of hope in the face of empire mean to us. Hope then, becomes a form of protest against forces of oppression, by which we mean the degradation of life and restriction of human flourishing, whether that arises from the political, economic, historical, religious, or social systems of which we are a part. Yet, how systems hurt people can be hard to discern for us who are privileged in wealth, race or ethnicity, in relationships or geography of birth.

Dean Brackley, a Jesuit priest serving in El Salvador, notes that perhaps 90 percent of all people who ever lived have struggled *every day* to keep the household alive against the daily threat of hunger, disease, accidents and violence. He says, “by distancing the non-poor from the daily threat of death, the benefits of modernity have induced in us a kind of chronic low-grade confusion about what is really important in life.”

Or as Wendell Berry notes, “Many small convenient comforts can oppose hope – (earlier he defines hope exactly as Jeremiah would, justice and righteousness in the land, especially for those who haven’t known much of it in their lives). Then Berry continues, “If most things are easy for us, we are tempted to wish they all were.” (Both the Brackley and Berry quotations come from a 7/10/17 *Christian Century* article, “What Does it Mean to Hope” by Charles Pinches.”

We lose our ability to recognize what degrades life and restricts human flourishing for people whose lives are much less comfortable than ours, and we are confused about whether or not we play a part in it, and that confusion leads to feeling paralyzed. When we sense that not all is right with the world yet we lack the ability to know what to do about it, that leads to distraction, on our phones, our busy-ness, maybe even our as Luke says, drunkenness, or dissipation – that word, by the way, is a late Greek

word found in medical writings to describe, “the nausea that follows a debauch” in other words, a hangover. (*The New Interpreter’s Commentary on Luke*)

If there is anything that Jeremiah is trying to tell us, or Jesus, it is that this world is not as it should be and one day Jesus will come back to set it right. We find no hope in our own effort to set it right, but we have every hope because Jesus will never stop loving this world and all of creation and the darkness will not overcome the light.

Recalibrate focus in the right direction, locate hope amidst the powerful forces of empire, and then, recommit ourselves to our work in bringing God’s kingdom ever nearer. Dissipation has several meanings in English, one which still connects it to drunkenness, but we may also know it from Physics as a loss of energy over time.

Attempting to counter powerful forces takes energy that depletes over time, especially when that energy is first forged in a reaction. George Floyd is murdered and we watched it on our phones, and we reacted with bold recommitment, but the energy dissipates over time, even when we don’t want it to. A pandemic hits, and we as a country commit to people, to children, not losing their housing, a pause on evictions, but the energy to not tolerate homelessness dissipates over time, even when we don’t want it to. And let this be an invitation to the Afghan discernment events beginning this Wednesday, so we don’t follow a similar path, reactive energy to a humanitarian refugee crisis that dissipates over time, even when we don’t want it to.

I think Jesus understands all of this, the energy patterns of his disciples, and of ours. So we get Advent 1 as a jolt, to recalibrate, locate and recommit. To unveil the kingdom of God we can’t yet see or understand, And the future days and time when the world will be set right, when all of God’s children live without fear of imminent death, and there are no children without safe places to sleep, and no one is denigrated, maybe even murdered for the .1% of DNA that makes skin color distinct.

Jeremiah knows that justice and righteousness in the land only comes by way of struggling towards it together, of working to bring God’s kingdom nearer. What is your part in that this Advent? What is our part together? How can you face the pull of all the forces calling you to focus on your own comfort, your own wants and needs, all the things you deserve and ways you can treat yourself - that our American cultural Christmas shouts from every form of media we have connected to this past week, and instead be on guard, and alert, to bring God’s kingdom of justice even nearer.

It won’t just happen without your intention, it is about recalibrating and locating and recommitting, standing up, heads towards Jesus, eyes ready.

Because, none of this happens without you, but also none of this happens without him. He is both our hope and the strength to hope, our compass and the force moving our needle toward him, his kingdom is the place of our commitment and the power to do so. He is the one who will come again in power and glory in that day and in that time and also, the gentle savior, the dayspring from on high, who puts death’s dark shadows to flight. To God alone be the glory, Amen.

