

Jeremiah 33:14-16 ~ Luke 21:25-36
The Days are Surely Coming: Take Hope
 December 2, 2018 ~ First Sunday of Advent ~ Communion Meditation
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Introduction to Gospel Reading: (Luke 21:5-7)

“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, , “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

Today’s gospel reading is the 9-verse conclusion of the 29-verse response to this question to Jesus from the people in the Temple. I’m guessing they were shaking in their boots (or their sandals, more likely) by the time he got to the part we are about to hear. They asked for a sign, but he gave them multiple signs. And not only that, he gave them an assignment.

Meditation:

You may have heard the story about the gentleman who knocks on his son’s door. “Jamie,” he says, “Wake up!” Jamie answers, “I don’t want to get up, Papa.” The father shouts, “Get up, you have to go to school.” Jamie says, I don’t want to go to school.” “Why not?” asks the father. Three reasons, says Jamie. “First, because it’s so boring; second, the kids tease me; and third, I hate school.” And Jamie’s father replies, “Well, I am going to give you three reasons why you must go to school. First, because it is your duty, second because you are 45 years old, and third, because you are the principal. Wake up!”

Whether we are 14 or 45 or 74 years old, our first impulse on most days is to resist getting out of bed in the morning. Our covers are so warm and cozy. Getting up means getting in gear, getting dressed, getting breakfast, and facing whatever the day may hold. Staying in bed seems like the better option when we first open our eyes, after a good night’s sleep.

Today, the first Sunday of Advent, is the season where God gives us a fresh jolt to “Wake up! And start over again! As a church, we have been rolling along in what we call “ordinary time” on our liturgical calendar for 33 Sundays. That’s over half the year of green on the communion table, the pulpit, the stole I wear, but today—did you notice? All of that green is gone. Today you see blue. Today begins the season to wake up to the larger reality of God’s cosmic plan. Today begins the season to take a fresh look, take a step back, take a breath, and gain perspective. The signs of God’s presence are all around us. But have we really been looking for them? In this either/or, us/them cultural landscape of ours, they can be difficult to spot. This new season is our chance. Christ is calling us to wake up to the signs that can lift us out of this trap. Christ was teaching, warning his followers in the Temple, to “Stay Woke” – to borrow the Black activist term in which I hear Jesus’ call to us, as well. Of course to do that, we have to wake up, first.

On this first day of our new liturgical calendar year, we are invited to find hope in the truth that no matter how low we may go, no matter how tired or desperate we may feel, no matter how ground down we may think our political and economic climate has become

in the chasms between the have's and have not's, or between the elites and non-elites, the "The days are surely coming," as Jeremiah prophesied to the exiled captives in the desperate days of Judah. Right when all seemed lost, Jeremiah promised that restoration and healing were just ahead. God had not given up on them. Nor has God given up on us. No matter what we do, no matter how bad it gets: *no defeat is more than transitory*. How can I possibly say that? Because: there is no end to God's love. The days are surely coming when God's justice and righteousness for all people will prevail.

Advent calls us to take a breath, take a step back, look up and gain the perspective we may have lost. Will we do this? Can we do this? I have my doubts. Why? Most of us are too busy looking at our phones and other devices. Many of us fill our calendars way too full (I am especially guilty of this bad habit). Especially we Presbyterians are prone to over prepare, in an attempt to control, predict, and manage our futures. This is not God's way. This is not God's vision. Advent is a chance to try opening things up, leaving space in your calendar, in your day, in your heart for the signs to appear and let the Holy Spirit call the shots. Did you know that Jesus tells us not to over prepare? Listen to what he says in Luke 21:14: "So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. [Students, you may not use this verse as an excuse when you don't do your homework.]

Their question to Jesus was this: "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" (Luke 21:7). We aren't the only ones who prefer either/or answers preferably written in advance. Just tell us we're in and who is out. Yet again and again, Jesus calls us to raise our heads and lift our gaze that we might see as Jesus sees us, enter the wide and wonderful land of "both/and." The land of paradox that stretches our little homo sapiens minds into the realm of no easy answers, but also the land where all things and all people can be made new.

The literal truth of what will happen at Jesus' Second Coming is beyond our wildest imaginations: but we know its good news because Love Wins. Leave those details up to God. Instead, Advent calls us to jump with renewed vigor into God's ways of justice and righteousness. Join God's restoration of the cosmos team. Right here in Marshfield. Here are some signs: The Naked Turkey in our Narthex, the NOW lunches packed, the Habitat Homes built, Advocacy for immigrant children separated from their parents, Advocacy for our one and only planet's delicate ecosystem on which we all depend.

What habits do you have that generate hope? Does your faith shape your advent season? If you are looking for sign, start here at this table, this bread and this cup are signs of God's inbreaking. This bread and this cup give us a chance to reboot, reset and start again. The black of the robe I wear is a sign of the darkness we live in apart from the Divine Love of God. Sin is the reason God sent Jesus to this world. If we are honest, we will admit that the darkness of today's world can threaten to swamp us.

Right here in our country, that threat seems to be growing and not shrinking. I was surprised and disturbed to hear on the news this week that life expectancy in the USA has dropped for the third time in three years. Primary cause of this trend, "deaths of despair." Synthetic opioid-related overdose death rates rose by 45% on average and the suicide rate is the highest it's been in decades. "These sobering statistics are a wake-up call that we are

losing too many Americans, too early and too often, to conditions that are preventable.” said Center for Disease Control Director, Robert Redfield.ⁱ Hope seems to be in ever decreasing supply among more and more people.

I hear God calling us to be hope generators this Advent. As we live into the already/not yet world between the First and Second Comings of Christ, our assignment is to live into the both/and vision of God. That is the vision that generates hope. How?

- Wake up to the power of God Almighty who was born as a baby in a barn.
- Get dirty: open up those stalls we haven’t dared to muck out for years.
- Stand in the dirt with others who are in it up to their eyeballs.

These are habits that will generate hope by Jesus, the light of all people. The reboot, regenerating power of Divine Love is here with us, among us: On tap right here at this Table.

I will end this meditation with one more assignment in the form of an old Hasidic tale about a Rabbi who asked his students: “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?” One of his students suggested, “When from a distance you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep?”

“No” was the answer from the Rabbi.

“Is it when one man can distinguish between a fig tree and a grape vine? Asked a second student.

“No,” the Rabbi said.

“Please tell us the answer, then,” said another of the students.

“It is then,” said the wise Rabbi, “when you can look into the face of human beings and you have enough light in you to recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Up until then it is night, and darkness is still with us.”

May the hour of dawn begin again for you and for us, this Advent.

ⁱ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46389147>