

Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36
Psalm 25:1-9

Each one of us regardless of how we observed the quaintly American custom of Thanksgiving, paused for at least a couple of days this past week to acknowledge our gratitude for what *is* going well in our life; for what *has* gone well in our life; and for what we hope *will* go well in our life with all things that are currently unsettled. We've all grown up with certain traditions about how we observe this uniquely American holiday known the world over as Thanksgiving. Many of us spend a few days with family that we don't necessarily see very often. Others of us spend it with intimate friends who have become family to us over the years. And whether we espouse a religion or not, not one of us can avoid the necessity to give thanks to some entity other than ourselves for all that has gone well in our lives and for all that we pray will be resolved positively in our lives. We do this little ritual once a year...and it's not tied to any one religion, but to an acknowledgement that there is a power...a force...greater than ourselves...that moves in this world and continues to create...even now.

As we pause to observe Thanksgiving with all its rituals, we also pause for a moment to recalibrate our church liturgical year. We have just completed the season of Pentecost...culminating last Sunday with Christ the King Sunday...and the teaching and learning season...when we get to know Jesus and he explains his mission to us and commissions us to continue in his mission of caring for those who do not have enough of anything so that they may know, through us, the extent of God's love for them.

And what greater gift could we offer up to God with all our gratitude than the gift of the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus to be flesh and blood among us so that we might have a chance to enter into a relationship with him and with God on a very personal and meaningful basis. It seems serendipitous that the First Sunday in Advent...the beginning of the preparation for welcoming Jesus into our world...would be the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend. God's power and love created this opportunity for each of us to enter into a personal relationship with Almighty God through His Son Jesus. And there is no more powerful or important or meaningful gift than that.

Every year as the Advent Season begins, we pause to acknowledge that God is doing a new thing....again!! God is perpetually creating...to nourish us, to sustain us, to love us, to plant the

seeds that will help us grow in spiritual stature which we could not do with the love and patience and forgiveness of Almighty God through his Son, Jesus.

It seems that God has always been creating...and continues to do so. But for us...time is a tricky thing. In this Advent season we are following the gospel of Luke in Year C. In this first Sunday of Advent, we first hear about the apocalyptic end of the world as we know it. It seems odd to hear about the end as we are preparing for the beginning, but the Time that Jesus and God use is not the same concept of time that we use. God is not constrained by chronos time...the time that is measured on the calendar or on a clock...the kind of time that keeps things happening sequentially instead of everything happening at once. But God's time is more like Kairos time that weaves future and past together into a present that contains both. In the Second Sunday of Advent in this year C we hear about Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry; and then we hear about John the Baptist and his prophecy about the One who is to come and lastly...just before we celebrate Christmas...the birth of Jesus...we hear about Mary and Elizabeth and their joy about bringing new life into the world and Mary's song about what her son will be like.

God's time is not necessarily linear. And time can have different effects depending on the emotions and events of the moment. Time moves much too quickly for those who are feeling on top of the world. And time moves much too slowly for those who must wait for something that hasn't yet happened and whose outcome is unknown. Time moves at a snail's pace for those who must wait. Our experience of time depends on what's happening during that time and what we are anticipating as we wait with time on our hands.

Who among us has not experienced the shifting aspects of time during the global pandemic? It's easy to become discouraged. It's easy to become frightened. It's easy to become lonely and despondent when we can't be in the company of people who mean so much to us. But always, in the back of our thinking, we know that God hears our pleas for relief. We know that God loves us. We know that God continues to work in the world even when we cannot see what God's new creation will be. We know that God is on our side. And we know that God has created a world that will be best for us and will sustain us. Sometimes we need to ask God to help us preserve that creation that sustains us even as we make choices that will destroy it.

Nevertheless, the apocalyptic vision shared by Jesus is assurance that even (and perhaps especially) in the face of devastation—whether it is caused by nature's fury or by human hubris—the reign of God will not be impeded. No matter how much it appears that the world is coming un-done, God's way endures. The coming of the Son of Man will therefore be

threatening to the powers that be, but it will bring release from oppression for the followers of Christ.

This “in-between time,” though fraught with tension, is nevertheless also characterized by hope as both the beginning and the ending of the story of the Church — and therefore of our story — which has been secured by Christ. We are therefore free to struggle, to wait, to work, to witness — indeed to live and die — with hope because we know the end of the story.

From Moses to Martin Luther King, Jr., history is full of examples of those who, because they had been to the mountaintop, had peered into the promised land, and had heard and believed the promise of a better future, found the challenges of the present not only endurable, but hopeful. We, too, amid the very real setbacks, disappointments, or worries of this life, can “stand up and raise [our] heads” because we have heard Jesus’ promise that our “redemption draws near.” And because we know what we do about Jesus, we know that his words are trustworthy. We can afford to believe them. We can take them to the bank...as they say!

We human beings tend to like things nice and orderly and predictable; we want to be able to count on certain laws of nature to be ones that we can depend upon: the sun will rise in the morning and it will set in the evening. There will be enough warmth from the sun to keep us reasonably comfortable and to allow edible crops to grow; there will be enough rainfall to ensure a plentiful water supply. The laws of nature will be consistent from one season to another. There are simply some things about the natural world that we can count on.

But that’s not what the lectionary readings for this first Sunday in Advent tell us. As a matter of fact, this first Sunday in Advent paints a picture of the unpredictable nature of what we assume to be the predictable....which reminds us once again that no matter how much we have figured out about the laws of nature, God is still in charge. It is up to God to decide how predictable those laws of nature are. And up to God to decide when and if those laws of nature should be changed or even abandoned.

It’s terrifying when the world in which we live becomes unpredictable. And yet, that’s the very time when we are presented with the ubiquitous presence of Almighty God. No matter how smart we are or how much we know or how much we have figured out, it is still God the creator who is in charge of the Creation. So on this first Sunday of Advent, we are reminded of the continuous creation of Almighty God and the fact that God is in charge and God continues to create a new thing...just when we think we’ve got the ‘old thing’ all figured out. The miracle of creation continues to evolve and the only thing we can count on for sure is the change orchestrated by God.

And we are reminded that time itself is not always linear; Jesus Christ is simultaneously the beginning and the end; the Alpha and the Omega; both the sacrificed and the triumphant. There are simply some realities to be taken on faith, not to be intellectually categorized and understood.

Remember, too, that there is no creation...God's included...that does not require some destruction. In order to make a new thing, very often an old thing needs to be re-organized or perhaps even destroyed. You can't sew a dress or a suit without cutting the single piece of fabric into smaller sizes of a special shape. You can't create a beautiful painting without squeezing the paint out of the tube or taking it from the jar. You can't make an ice cube without freezing the water. A single sperm and egg must combine in order to become a zygote and the beginning of a new creature. Creation employs a certain amount of destruction and since God continues to create, we must trust the creator as we mourn the destruction of what we know and understand. It's a matter of faith...and a matter of trust. Do we trust the One who created all things...including us? And do we have faith that the One who created us and our world loves us and wants the best for us? Will we, in fact, allow God to take care of us?

As we begin this season of Advent and the welcoming of Jesus into our world, let's remember how much trust on our part is involved in letting Jesus into our world. We can't embrace this breathtaking gift from God without opening our arms and our hearts completely.

And with God's help, we will.

AMEN.