

12/2/2018

“Living an Expectant Life”

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36; Jeremiah 33:14-16

First Sunday of Advent

Theme: Living a life in Christ means acknowledging his coming into our world long ago to reveal God’s love and salvation and waiting with loving expectation for his return some day in glory.

Jesus said . . . (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. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“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, 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, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

So, how do these words make you feel today? Not what you might expect to hear just several weeks before Christmas?!

† Today begins the Season of Advent

The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. The word Advent means “the arrival of a notable person, thing or event” (Wikipedia), and comes from the Latin verb *advenire*, which means “to come toward, to draw near, to approach.” Concerning Advent, The United Methodist Book of Worship, states the following: “The season proclaims the comings of the Christ—whose birth we prepare to celebrate once again, who comes continually in Word and Spirit, and whose return in final victory we anticipate.” (*The United Methodist Book of Worship* Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House, 238)

Advent is, therefore, a time of expectation.

It’s also a time when most of us these days are thinking about Christmas and the expectations we have for it. Some of us can hardly wait, while others may already be stressing out about all that has

to be done before then. For some, they can hardly wait to come together again with family and friends, parties at work, or community gatherings; while others may be facing strained or broken relationships, financial difficulties, illness, other uncertainty, or the first Christmas without a loved one who has passed.

Sometimes, when I reflect upon all the changes over my lifetime and the uncertainties life brings, I remember my childhood.

I remember one Christmas Eve as a child, when I was about seven or eight years old. We were snowed-in down in South Philadelphia, where my grandmother and most of my aunts, uncles and cousins lived at the time. My mother made me go to bed around 10pm. I shared a bed with one of my cousins. We decided to wait up all night – or at least until midnight – so that we could get a glimpse of Santa Claus when he came.

My mother came in to check on us at about 11:30pm. We heard her coming, so we pretended to be asleep. She came quietly into the room, waited a minute or so, and then said, “OK you two, get to sleep.”

Perhaps, some of you remember a similar time. But, why? Why did we try to fight sleep so hard? Because we were expecting Santa Claus to come! Advent is a time like that, a time of expectation.

It is a time to remember, as I mentioned last week, how most Jews living at the time of Jesus’ birth were living in expectation of the Messiah or Christ, an earthly king from the lineage of David.

As Jeremiah, a prophet who lived centuries before Christ’s birth foretold:

“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. 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. 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.’” (Jeremiah 33:14-16)

Such a king or ruler would lead the people in righteousness, justice, and peace for all.

Such a ruler would bring a time and place of security and safety.

Such a place would be filled with people who lived the way of loving God and loving others as themselves.

But when he came, it was not as most people expected. The one who came to save his people was not born in a palace but in a simple manger, in the natural shelter of a cave. Yet, why would it be so unexpected? Had they forgotten? Was not Moses the greatest leader, prophet and teacher they had previously had been born into slavery and cast upon the river in a simple straw basket?!

And still, the Messiah, savior king who was born, was also not quite what most expected. And, the fulfillment of his kingdom was only begun upon his leaving earth.

Advent, a season of expectation.

It grew out of the life of the early Christian church, because those who were faithful to Jesus waited with yearning and anticipation, amid suffering and persecution, hardship and changes, for the return of their victorious Christ. Victorious, yes, not over other men and kingdoms, but over sin and death itself.

They remembered the words he had earlier spoken while upon the earth; words of gloom and doom, fear and foreboding for some; yet words of promise and hope, joy and jubilation for others. Words of watchful expectation.

† **Living an expectant life in Christ we experience and share God's love with others**

Advent reminds us that we, who are living in Christ, have received and realize God's love. Advent reminds us that we have more living to do while we wait for his return. We have the love of God and the good news of Jesus to share with others.

It occurred for the first time to me just this past week that the same root word for advent is that of “**adventure**”. Life itself, and our life with Christ in particular, is an adventure of faith, hope, and love.

Living an expectant life with Jesus is an adventure!

We may not always know what tomorrow or even today will bring. Yet, we can face it with faith, hope and love.

As some of you know, Karen and I were blessed to have eighteen family members from both sides for Thanksgiving dinner this year, coming from seven different states! Some came days before, and some stayed a few days after. Two of the couples, nephews and their wives, I had the pleasure of performing marriages for out of state within the past five years. All these events took considerable preparation and prayers for safe travels. And, we received many blessings from each. But, we know from experience that we are not guaranteed the same opportunity next year.

Yesterday, as some of you know, a 7.0 earthquake struck near Anchorage, Alaska, where some of our family still lives. We are thankful that none were injured, and minimal damage sustained. We are glad that we have an extended family with faith in God. And, we know that this will provide another opportunity to extend God's love to them and others.

Right here in Chesapeake City and our community, I'm sure there are those who are wondering, struggling, doubting and perhaps even disbelieving that God loves them or even if there is a God. I

am glad that we know there is a God who loves us, and who loves them. And, there are ways that we can, and do, share and show that love.

So . . .

Questions for Reflection:

What are your expectations this Christmas?

How have you experienced God's love this year and in your life?

How have you, do you, hope to, or will you share that love this Advent & Christmas Season?

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