“The Days are Surely Coming”

Advent 1C-21

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

Luke 21: 25-36

11/28/21

**Prayer for Illumination**

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

**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.”

The Days are Surely Coming…

Paradox. If there’s just one word to describe this season of Advent… paradox just may be it. The word itself means “arrival,” but in many ways, we celebrate Advent this morning because of what hasn’t arrived yet. Scripture tells us that while God came once in Jesus Christ… Christ will come again to fulfill all things. As Jesus told his disciples in our Gospel lessons this morning, in days to come… at a time we cannot know and cannot predict, he will return, amid the end of time in order to inaugurate the kingdom of God once and for all.

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads,” he said, “because your redemption is drawing near.”

So at one and the same time… Advent calls us to look back at Jesus’ first incarnation to see how God’s promises are fulfilled… even as Advent also calls us to look forward to the next Advent… when all of God’s promises will be fulfilled.

……

Until then… we live in this in-between time. In-between the Advents of God.

When we are paradoxically broken and yet redeemed.

Claimed by God and yet still in this world.

Empowered to love and heal, but also brutally capable of causing hate and harm.

It’s testimony to the very paradox found within the theme of this first Sunday of Advent—hope.

After all, hope is beautiful. Hope is lifegiving. Hope is utterly essential in this broken world of ours. But hope is beautiful… hope is life-giving and essential precisely because our world is broken… because our world is still so full of pain.

For the hope of Advent… much more than simply an aspiration or an objective for which we aim… Hope is the longing not for what is… but what we believe should be. Hope is the yearning… the longing… for what we trust God will still do.

……

If you listen closely… you can hear the longing in Jeremiah’s voice…

The days are surely coming… he said.

The days are surely coming.

Jeremiah was prophesizing to a brutalized nation of Israel. They’d been defeated and humiliated amid a series of life-draining debacles.

Debacle 1– God sent prophets to warn Israel’s religious and political leaders that their dark and greedy ways were leading Israel right into the hands of the rising Babylonian empire. But the leaders failed to heed the prophets’ warnings… and Babylon came and conquered both Jerusalem and Judah.

Debacle 2 – After falling to Babylon, some Hebrews mounted an uprising, but the Babylonians squashed it, and took many of the Hebrew leaders out of Judah and put them in exile, so they couldn’t lead another revolt.

Debacle 3 – Yet more Hebrews tried to revolt against the empire, but again, Babylon triumphed. And this time, the Babylonians took many Hebrews out of their homeland, forcing them to live in exile.

Debacle 4 – To add insult to injury, Babylon intentionally laid waste to Jerusalem… destroying its homes, its fields… even the holy Hebrew temple.

So there this once proud people of God sat… taken out of the land of their ancestors… away from life as they knew it… forced to live as exiled prisoners of another state where they sat and waited… longing to go home. Longing to return to life as they knew it could be. Life as they believed it should be…

But days turned to nights, months turned to years, and decades past amid their Babylonian exile. As time wore on, many Hebrews began struggling to hold onto hope. Living as captives in another land, many began to think they’d been forgotten. That God had ignored their prayers. That this was simply the way life was going to be. “So better just accept it,” they told themselves. “May as well adopt the Babylonian customs… may as well start studying the Babylonian language… maybe even worship the Babylonian gods.”

That’s what happens when you begin to lose hope. When you begin to lose sight of the God whose promises hold true… when you stop looking for the God who never abandons you, and the new things God has in store.

So God sent them Jeremiah, one of the very prophets God sent to warn Israel about Babylon’s coming. But this time… rather than prophesying warning… Jeremiah was sent to prophesy promise. To prophesy hope. To remind Israel that even when things are hard… or messy… or painful… they can count on God to remain faithful. Even when calamity strikes and life has been turned upside down… they can count on God to remain faithful. Even when they feel forgotten, or that God has given up on them… even when every piece of evidence seems contrary, they can trust their future to God.

“The days are surely coming,” Jeremiah said, “The days are surely coming when God will fulfill God’s promises. The days are surely coming when Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will be restored,” he proclaimed. “The days are surely coming when God’s people will again know prosperity and peace. The days are surely coming,” Jeremiah foretold, “when God will save you… and restore you… and life will be as it should be.”

……

The days are surely coming…

The days are surely coming…

It’s a refrain of hope that finds its fulfillment in the God who keeps promises. Always. Forever.

……

……

The days are surely coming…

It’s a refrain that’s been running through my mind over and over and over lately… but not just because of Advent.

As some of you know, our eldest is a senior, and has been applying to college.

Our daughter is now a sophomore.

And our youngest will be in Middle School next year.

Which means… the days are surely coming when… our family… our household will change.

When the dinner table won’t be quite as full.

When goodnight kisses and daily hugs won’t be as readily possible.

And those who know me well know that’s a real growing edge for me. Because, before I identify as anything else, I am first as a father. Like most parents, I love my kids more than life itself. Being their dad has been the greatest joy of my life.

Which is why there’s a part of me… a big part of me… is more than a little resistant to the days that are surely coming. There’s a big part of me that, if I could, would just freeze time, you know. Keep them who and where they are forever. And if I can’t figure out how to do that… then at least figure out how to lock them up in our house and then throw away the key. Because I love them… and I love spending time with them.

But… the days are surely coming, right? The days are surely coming, Advent reminds me.

……

It’s taken me a while to see it… but it’s helped me see just how frequently what we think we want… what we think we need or would prefer… can actually end up sabotaging our deepest hopes and truest longings… not just for ourselves… but for those around us.

For what I truly long for… what I really yearn for… is not for my kids to never leave home. I tease them that I’ll figure out how. But in truth… my deepest longing… my truest hope is for the fullness of their future. A fullness and a future I know cannot be found if they’re glued to our home.

Which has given me a newfound appreciation this year not just for Advent’s call to hope in God… but its reminder that what we choose to hope for matters.

In a broken and hurting world… Advent reminds us that what we hope for matters.

In a world in which everyone seems hellbent on getting what they think they want… what we hope for matters.

In a world with broken relationships… in a world with so much contempt and division… what we hope for matters.

In a world with so much greed… that still values dollars and power more than people… what we hope for matters.

In a world where people still know the pain of isolation… of abuse… of addiction…

In a world in which fear seems so much more present than peace… what we hope for matters.

In this world that so clearly lives in-between the Advents of God—in between the time God became incarnate in Christ… and the time Christ will come again to fulfill all things… what we hope for matters.

Because what we hope for, is ultimately what we strive for.

What we hope for, is ultimately what we strive for.

……

So Advent asks us… communally… and individually… for what do you long? For what do you hope?

It’s a far different question than simply what would you like? Or what do you think you want?

Hope is rooted not in fleeting moments or desires… but an awareness that not all is as it should be. That not all is as God says it will be.

So what do you hope for? For what do you long?

Health… for you… for another?

Comfort… for you… for another?

A sense of peace?

Stability? A new opportunity?

Companionship? Purpose? Strength?

Justice? Creation Care?

An end of hunger? No children in poverty?

The cessation of violence?

What do you hope for? For what to you deeply, truly long?

It matters, Advent insists. Because *what you hope for, is what you will strive for*.

And in the days to come… as we live in-between the Advents of God in this world… what better vessels of hope does God have to work with than you and me… the body of Christ… those who look back and see God’s promises kept even as we look ahead and see the promises still to be fulfilled… knowing that as we trod this path in-between the kingdom’s revelation and the kingdom’s installation… God still journeys with us… each and every step… both this day… and all the days to come.

So hope, Advent declares. Hope in the future that, even now, God is still creating… and calling us to share. Amen.