

Year C Advent 1

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

Luke 21: 25- 36

Well, we have arrived at the season of Advent. A time of waiting. A time of anticipation. A time of hope, joy, peace and love. But also, a season which more than most other seasons accentuates a non-linear understanding of time.

For we look and anticipate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, the birth of a vulnerable baby. However, we all know this baby has already been born, and with God's grace we can know that this baby is being born anew in us every single day, should we accept that invitation. Emmanuel, God-with-us, who came, who is coming and who is among us now.

Therefore, it is always a bit of a jolt when we have a reading, every three years, from Jeremiah on Advent Sunday. A prophet not renowned for joy.

Jeremiah exhorts the people who were taken into captivity in Babylon after the calamitous fall of Jerusalem, to have hope. Jeremiah understood the reality of human despair; their experiences of being taken captive, of having witnessed the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Despite the sacking of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, they were to have hope. It was acceptable and actually necessary to cry out to the Lord in anger and despair, as that showed a belief in God's power to provide salvation, to provide a different future from the current lived experience.

Jeremiah was clear that the 'days are coming' when God's promises will be fulfilled, and the exiles were to have hope and be filled with a longing for God to be among them. Jeremiah knew that God hears the cry of his people, hears the prayers for our longings for the whole earth to be flooded with God's mercy and justice.

Jeremiah reminds the exiles of God's promises, that God would provide a safe, just and peaceful future under a justly appointed and righteous ruler. For the exiles, without any clear way out of their current situation, they were called to wait, with hope and longing for the day when God's promise would be fulfilled; fulfilled with the coming of Jesus.

In the reading from Luke's Gospel we are certainly not reading about angels, shepherds, stables and a baby Jesus yet! What we get is Jesus in the Temple, with what some consider to be frightening, confusing metaphors and admonitions; in fact an apocalypse, a revelation of what is to come. Jesus is challenging the hearer, and the reader, to look up, to pay attention, and be ready; ready for his second coming. So this reading gives us a second insight to the season of Advent; a time of waiting and longing for Christ to return, not of fear and dread as some may think when they read today's gospel.

In Advent we are called to prepare for two comings of Christ. Firstly, to prepare for the coming of God to us as a baby, the conventional and commonly understood Advent activity. Secondly, to prepare for the return of Christ to earth at some future time, not 'if', but definitely 'when'. And it is clear from Luke's Gospel that Jesus is deeply desiring that we be ready, that we keep alert, constantly preparing, continually putting our hope in our loving God, who comes to us in Jesus Christ.

And we know this because God is love, and we are God's children. We say this every week, but we need to hear it and believe it. God wants to redeem us; "Your redemption is drawing near" is what Jesus said.

There is tremendous hope in that apocalyptic writing, as it describes a better world, a better world that can break through at any time. Our broken and hurting world that we can read and watch about until we become numb – famine, drought, war, disease, greed, abuse of power and authority, addiction, social and cultural values leading to poor mental health, misplaced priorities - desperately needs Christ to come.

We are called to take this Advent time to prepare to receive him, once more, and completely afresh. For we know that Christ is coming. His coming means that we can be filled with hope. God's word, embodied in Jesus Christ is coming to us as a baby, and promises us a new life; promises us hope for something new. We are all called to prepare for God's kingdom breaking through.

Jurgen Moltmann, in his book 'The Theology of Hope' states that Christian hope is not an 'opium of the beyond' but rather 'the divine power that makes us alive in the world'.

As I have said before, the notion of 'hope' for a Christian is not a noun, but is a verb. As part of our action for hope to be realised, during this season of Advent I believe we are called to imagine; to imagine God's promised future, just as Jeremiah called the exiles to imagine a future beyond their current reality. Trusting so much in God's provision in the past, we are called to imagine what shape God's fulfilment of promises will take in the future. In our imagining

and in our waiting, in our desiring of God's coming Kingdom, and in our prayers, we can become partners with God in the advent, the coming, the arrival, of a new reality.

Jeremiah is clear that Christ shall reign with justice and righteousness and from that shall flow healing and salvation. Luke's Gospel is clear that the word of God is transformational and eternal.

We are to prepare to receive our Lord Jesus Christ once more, with our hearts filled with hope, with a desire for God's kingdom of justice, of righteousness, of healing and salvation.

May each one of us find time to sit in hope and hear how the Holy Spirit may use us to partner with Christ in making His kingdom come.