

Sermon Advent 1, November 28, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

[Psalm 25:1-9](#)

[1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#)

[Luke 21:25-36](#)



ST. LUKE'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

God our Creator, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light – by the power and love of Christ the Light, who was and is and is to come. Amen.

Friends, welcome to St. Luke's – and welcome to this season of Advent. This is a season when we open our eyes to the world around us, when we open our hearts to be stirred with expectant hope for glory – for holy, life-giving, healing Light to break forth, for a peace beyond our understanding and kingdom not of this world that remakes the world.

Advent is a season of hope and preparation. We prepare ourselves to meet Christ the Light, Christ who is God-with-us, Christ the Healer and Judge of Nations who will come again.

We begin Advent with the big, cosmic picture in the scriptures of this first week. All around us appear signs as this earth moves through the heavens, and sky and ground and seas howl and roar in anguish over the chaos that we seem to unleash so easily. And yet, even as Jesus himself points to these times when everything seems to be shaken, he reminds us of what endures and holds steady beyond all the turmoil and changes of this world: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

We think this year of what our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong and Taiwan might be feeling. Or the people in Myanmar. Or our kin in Ethiopia. All places where the sabers of war are being rattled, where the skies fill with storm and the ground itself seems unfirm. We think this year of all places around this world continuing to be affected by the unseen and unpredictable windstorms of this pandemic. We think this year of the unsettling currents in our own nation's life, tugging people like rip-tides away from sure ground and spreading quietly then suddenly like wildfires through our lives.

Yes, there will be signs all around. But know this. “Heaven and earth will pass away. But my words will not pass away.”

“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (John 1:1,3)

So, our eyes and minds and hearts can stop darting around from thing to thing. Our eyes and minds and hearts can steady themselves. Prepare yourselves to meet the Lord of Life! Begin by knowing that there is steady, sturdy reality, deeper and more solid than anything else we know, in Christ the Light. “Stand up and raise your heads – because your redemption is drawing near!” Raise your heads, lift up your hearts, and hold steady in the assurance of hope. As Jesus says, don't be weighed down by dissipation, drunkenness, and worry. Don't be made low and heavy in heart by squandering your life's energy and resources carelessly and frivolously. Don't be made low and heavy in heart by becoming intoxicated by any substances or things, or by any ideas. Don't be made low and heavy in heart by allowing yourself to dwell on anxieties about the troubles of this life, by letting situations that can so easily gnaw away at our lives. No! Raise your heads, join hands, lift up your hearts – redemption is drawing near!

Advent begins with an honest look at the brokenness of the world around us, and an honest cry for help and deliverance. And, Advent begins with Hope.

What is hope?

Hope is not simply wishful thinking. It is not blind optimism.

Hope is something more secure – more anchored and rooted – more solid. Hope is built on promise and on vision, words that have been given to us that ring true with assurance of a reality that will come. We may only have seen a glimpse or heard a whisper of that reality of a new day dawning. But that little bit we have seen or heard has taken hold of us – because it rises with strength beyond anything we are experiencing.

Hope is assured expectation that is rooted in trust. Hope is desire that we are willing to hold and believe will be fulfilled because we trust so much in the One that we desire.

This last week, I shared a quote from the organization, “Hope Grows.” This organization exists to offer support, relief, and counseling to people who have had to devote themselves to being caregivers for others. Caregivers face a long, long road of offering care for loved ones who cannot care for themselves – and discouragement and weariness can eventually set in. This organization, “Hope Grows,” seeks to rekindle and strengthen hope again for people who have grown incredibly weary from their committed care. Their website says, “Having hope is important to the very act of being a human being. As Dr. Judith Rich [writes](#), ‘Hope is a match in a dark tunnel, a moment of light, just enough to reveal the path ahead and ultimately the way out’” (<https://hopegrows.net/news/why-is-hope-so-important>).

We are called and invited to hope. To root ourselves in hope. And to be ambassadors of hope for others all around us. Through our actions and words, big and small, we hold up the light of hope – whether a matchlight, a torch, or a beacon – and we embrace and proclaim the truth given to us in Christ in whom we trust: “New life emerges. New life will emerge. Because life does not die easily.”

So, in deep darkness and turmoil of the times around him, the prophet Jeremiah held up a matchlight of hope. He held up the image of a branch growing again from what seemed like a fallen dead tree. Over half a millennium before Jesus, the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah were crumbling. The kingly line of David had all but died, and had been overrun with corruption over the centuries. Israel had been overrun by the Assyrian Empire. Judah was on the verge of collapse before the Babylonian Empire. Jeremiah spoke as a prophet that named the bleak reality Judah was facing. The hoped heritage of righteous and good kingship had died – and then the hope of a free nation had died.

Centuries later, in the time of the Roman Empire, the Jewish people’s hope of final emergence from being a dislocated or occupied people seemed faint, as new occupations and captivities happened with each new empire.

“Heaven and earth may pass away. But my words will not pass away.” So, Jeremiah’s words of promise from God held hope for God’s people through the centuries – “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.” The tree will be born again and rise like never before!

How many of you have seen, in hikes in the forests, new young trees growing from stumps or from fallen trees? These are so amazing. They may be emerging from life still in the roots of the dead tree – a form of epicormic growth. Or they may be taking root in nutrient-rich decaying wood of the fallen tree that serves as a “nurse log.” And life emerges and spreads.

Tenacity. Creativity. Adaptability. These are some of the ways that Hope shows itself in life all around us. Life is even in the most unexpected places on this planet – in the darkest depths of the ocean, right next to the depths thermal vents – even there, without light, life is feeding on nothing like we feed on.

Because God our Creator has said, “Let there be life!” And so, light sparks. Life emerges from fire, from forest floor deaths, from the darkest places in the world. Even in death there is life possible. Because that is how God created all things and all life.

Steady, friends. Raise your heads, lift up your hearts, join your hands and voices, and sing and shout of the God of Life and of Christ who is God’s light ever coming into the world. And let us give the light of gratitude, joy, and love to each other. We dare to hope because we have learned to trust. We learn to trust because we have experienced love.

As we prepare to meet Christ, let us be ready to seek and serve Christ in those around us and to be the light of Christ to those around us. Let us be ready – and expectant – to meet Christ through the love we offer and the love we allow ourselves to receive.

Let us all pray that we all find our way home, that light breaks through, that Christ the Healer arise and touch all people. And, as Paul hoped for the Thessalonians, may the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all.