

Sermon Advent 1, December 1, 2024

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene
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[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

[Psalm 25:1-9](#)

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

[Luke 21:25-36](#)

Oh Adonai our Creator and Source of all things, 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 the season of Advent, this season of awaiting and preparing for the coming of Christ. Welcome to this season of Advent here at St. Luke's, where you will find warmth and open hearts in the midst of the cold and uncertainty of these times. Welcome to this season when we take stock of the long sweep of history, open our eyes to the world around us, and open our own 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.

This past week, while Heather and I traveled back to the Midwest for Thanksgiving with our college kids and other family. I saw a brief documentary on the stars and our relationship with them throughout history. Ancient Polynesians finding and mapping the islands of the Pacific, first by sitting and mapping and memorizing the movement of the stars in the sky. Europeans navigating around the world, first by studying and writing and calculating the positions of the stars in the heavens in order to chart a path. And the thought left to us at the end of this documentary was that maybe our relationship with the stars in the heavens is just part of our deepest nature – we would say part of what we are and how we are related and intertwined by our Creator with the entirety of creation. So – it does us well to listen to the earth and the sea and the sky and the heavens above, and to our fellow creatures.

Let's consider what we are part of.

While traveling back from our Midwest trip yesterday, I had the opportunity to watch part of a series from the Discovery Channel, on the powers of the universe. The first piece in the series introduced us to the ways that the millions and billions of galaxies – not just stars, but galaxies! – are not just scattered randomly across the universe but are connected to each other by what is called the Cosmic Web. Trails of hydrogen are stretched through space between galaxies. Dark Matter has from the beginning been moving in ways that has laid the structure and paths for the strands of this Cosmic Web to form. Along this Cosmic Web, galaxies are born and stars from their unbelievably hot, chaotic centers burst into being and ignite into light.

*Creator of the stars of night,
Your people's everlasting light,
O Christ, redeemer of us all,
We pray you hear us when we call.*

We begin our time of great awaiting and preparing with this huge, cosmic picture in the scriptures – coming to us directly from the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. As Jesus said to his followers, all around us there are signs as this earth moves through the heavens, and sky and ground and seas speak. Part of what we hear them speak comes in the form of howls and roars in anguish over the chaos that we as humans unleash so easily. As our scriptures elsewhere say, “All creation groans as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Rom. 8:22).

We in our ultra-modern and post-modern twists of reality, where we have blinded ourselves to what is all around us by our attention to our cellphones and screens and to our city-scapes and town-scapes illuminating the night with lights of our own making – we have become cut off from what creation all around us is telling us, and aside from our scientists and those working most closely with our forests, fields, and seas, we are not hearing or seeing the cries and groans of the earth and skies. We do not know how anymore to read the signs in the stars, the sun, and the moon. We even count these signs and cries of creation as pointless, because we feel our supposed rise above the forces of nature as we erect our Towers of Babel, now with AI our own creation in our own image that we are allowing to do our thinking for us. We are losing our interconnection, and so we are losing touch with ourselves and the core of who we are – and whose we are.

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 human family in Gaza and Lebanon and Israel might be feeling. Or the people in Ukraine. Or our kin in Sudan and South Sudan. So many places where the sabers of war are rattled and swung, where the skies fill with storm and the ground itself seems unfirm. We think this year of the many nations wrestling with what to do at their borders, and the many people seeking refuge and escape into new places for a fresh start. We look ahead to changes in this nation’s life, unsure of where these changes will take us as a people who at this point seem to have only thin strands in any web of unity.

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).

“Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:4).

“Heaven and earth will pass away. But my words will not pass away.”

Oh Christ Jesus, help us be still and abide in you.

Help our eyes and minds and hearts stop darting around from thing to thing.

Help us steady ourselves as we abide with you and trust in you.

While it is light, and when it is dark, stay with us – and help us to stay connected with you.

Help us prepare ourselves to meet you, the Lord of Life, the One who has been there from the beginning of all things!

Friends, we 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, trust in the strength of Christ with you, 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 get to you. No! Raise your heads, join hands, trust in the God of life, look to the stars and listen to the yearning of creation, and lift up your hearts – redemption is drawing near!

There are several words I hope you will take with you as guides through this Advent season and into the year ahead.

Abide. Watch. Trust. Hope.

Now, as any time, **abide** with Christ, and let Christ abide with you. Make space in your mind and heart. Welcome Jesus as your companion in every place. Set aside things that distract. Even as you busy yourself with activities of daily life and of the holiday season, let Christ be your close companion, as close as your own heartbeat.

Now, **watch** and be ready. Let yourself perk up with listening ears and watchful eyes and an eager heart, looking for the coming of Christ even now. Let yourself become more attuned to the movement of the Holy Spirit in and all around you. Remain watchful and aware of what is happening in the world – and, in that world, seek and serve Christ in every person you encounter, expecting to meet Christ at each turn.

Now, **trust** in the Lord with all your heart. Trust that the light of stars will continue to burn bright. Trust that God is steady and present and moving with all things. Give yourself, align yourself, put your confidence in the One who already abides with you, who has made you and all things, who is coming and is already here with you. Put your heart, mind, soul, and strength with Adonai, with Emmanuel – and with no other force or power on earth.

Now, give yourself to **hope**. See the brokenness of the world around us, and let your cry arise in hope and trust for help and deliverance. Join the groans and cries of all creation that looks in hope to God who has promised a new day dawning. Let that little glimpse we have seen or heard has taken hold of us – because it rises with strength beyond anything we are experiencing. Root yourselves in hope. And be ambassadors of hope for others all around us. Through our actions and words, big and small, let us hold high the light of hope – whether a matchlight, a torch, or a beacon – with that promise that is the very nature of Christ: “New life emerges. New life will emerge. Because life does not die easily.”

“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!

Even now, out in the expanses of the Cosmic Web stretching across the universe, new galaxies are bursting into bright being around massive black holes, and new stars are flashing into fiery force from their chaos.

Even now, in the forests around us, fallen trees have given themselves to become nurse logs for new trees. Life continues to emerge and spread.

Abide. Watch. Trust. And Hope.

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 their, 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 in the One who abides with us and who is at work in all people and all creation. 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.