

## ADVENT ONE

November 29, 2015

Jeremiah 33:14-16

*The God of Promise-Keeping*

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

The word from Jeremiah in our first lesson was spoken in **a situation of national and religious disillusionment**. The people were **certain that God had forgotten about them, or that**, because of their sinfulness, **God had turned his back on them**.

Once upon a time, God had made promises to their ancestors. God had promised to uphold the kingdom of David and his descendants. And **God had promised to bring about salvation**. They had believed those promises.

But **THOSE WORDS SEEMED LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN A FAIRY TALE NOW**, because the house of David was vacated and the temple was empty.

Those people who remembered the promises, probably thought they were **only an empty pipe dream**, something that would never really happen.

But **into this time of despair and darkness**, the **voice of Jeremiah breaks**, *"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel..."*

*"Nothing", says Jeremiah, "NOTHING CAN PREVENT GOD FROM KEEPING THE PROMISES OF SALVATION."*

It took several more centuries, didn't it? It took hundreds of years before those promises found their fulfillment in the first coming of Jesus Christ.

In the babe born in Bethlehem, God fulfilled the words of promise, *"in those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."*

During Advent, we look back to the first coming of the savior, and the fulfillment of promises made so long ago by God.

But Advent **isn't just about looking back**. We often **act as if it is**. We often **live as if Christianity is only about something that happened a long time ago**. We forget God's promises. We forget that **the promises are still alive**. The promises which found fulfillment in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus will have their **final fulfillment in the future**.

Advent isn't only about looking back. Advent is about **looking ahead, to the future**. Advent is about waiting.

But **we've forgotten how to wait expectantly**. We have forgotten how to yearn for the fulfillment of those promises. Or maybe it's that we have become so used to things the way they are, that we can't imagine anything different.

Maybe we've actually **come to think that this earthly life is really all there is**.

Or else we see the injustice and violence and suffering and lack of meaning in our world, and we think that God's promises are dead.

"*Sure, Jesus came, but nothing really changed,*" we think. At least, that's far too often the way we live our lives. But then the words of Jeremiah come crashing into our world:

"*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise,*" he tells us. **GOD'S PROMISES ARE NOT DEAD.**

**GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES.**

Think of what some of those promises foretell. The Bible is full of beautiful word-pictures of what eternal life will be like.

One of those was read yesterday for Ken Kronemann's funeral. Isaiah 25 paints a picture of eternal life as a wonderful feast -- a banquet where all the saints, from every generation, will be gathered around a table filled with rich foods and fine wines. And then, the Bible says, *God will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces.*"

This is the promise of God to all who believe in his son, Jesus Christ. **What a difference it would make in our lives IF WE LIVED AS IF WE TRULY BELIEVED IN THE PROMISE!**

It has been said that "*The present shapes the future*" But the opposite is just as true. For us Christians, "*the future can shape the present.*"

The **future of eternal life with God** -- a life without sorrow, or death or suffering -- that future **helps us live our lives today** in the hope of that wonderful tomorrow.

Paradoxically, while we await that future with longing, we **don't let our waiting keep us from living in the present**. We don't allow our longing for heaven to make us "*no earthly good*".

But, many of us just can't understand the value of waiting for anything. We're busy people. We don't have the time to wait.

Besides, **if we really want something**, can't we just PAY THE EXPRESS FEE AND HAVE IT RIGHT NOW? After all, if I have Amazon Prime, shipping is free and it'll arrive tomorrow!

When I was a child, we lived about 4 blocks from the big Sears Roebuck's store on Lake Street in Minneapolis. And sometimes if my mom or dad wanted something, but couldn't afford it, they would put \$5 down on the item so that the store would set it aside until we could pay the rest. "*Layaway*", they called it.

But nowadays we don't believe in layaway, do we. We figure, "*why should we wait?*"

Just whip out the plastic money and run it through the scanner. PRESTO: INSTANT GRATIFICATION.

**No waiting required.**

WE HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW TO WAIT.

And so **we don't understand Advent at all**. Because waiting seems like such a waste of time. But the waiting of Advent is not like sitting in a doctor's waiting room reading last years old magazines. **The waiting of Advent is an active, dynamic waiting.**

Sometimes that action is by the Holy Spirit, working within our hearts to prepare us for Christ's coming. Although it's dynamic, it may be a quiet waiting.

And other times our waiting means **moving out into the world** to share the good news of Jesus' coming with others, through word and deed.

Advent is about **looking to the past**, and **looking to the future**, but **Advent is** also about looking around us right now.

THE FUTURE PROMISE SHAPES OUR PRESENT.

The present world can be frightening, can't it? We live in a world where fearful things are happening everywhere.

But, as Christians, we don't need to be afraid. God tells us over and over again – more than a hundred times in the Bible – "Be not afraid".

And, because we know God's promises are sure, because we know **our future is in God's gracious and loving hands**, we can joyfully face that future with hope, while we turn our energies to sharing that hope and sharing God's promises with our world in the here and now.

The season of Advent **helps us Christians lift our eyes from the suffering and problems of our world** to the wonderful future that God has promised us. Advent reminds us that "*the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise...*" AND SO WE WAIT.

The **world around us** may be **falling apart** and the **world within us** may be **tearing us down**. But Advent reminds us that God keeps his promises! We can count on that. AND SO WE WAIT.

Advent lifts us up from despair and points us to God's promises of salvation and eternal life. **And so we wait in anticipation.** Even in the darkest darkness, we can wait for the fulfillment of those promises, because we have faith in God: the promise-keeper.

During Advent, we wait in hope for the coming of the Light of the World.

But as we wait for Christ to come, GOD'S SPIRIT POINTS US RIGHT BACK TO OUR WORLD, here and now. There's a bumper sticker that says, "*Jesus is coming soon. Look busy!*" But Advent is a time when we can actually BE BUSY, in a quiet, meaningful way.

Because the Holy Spirit **uses our waiting to renew us in our efforts to serve our neighbors and share God's promises** with everyone.

Those promises are real.

Those promises will be fulfilled.

A pastor friend of mine posted the following reflections on Facebook immediately after the Paris attacks. I shared this in the *Messenger*, but I think it's worth repeating here, because her words are appropriate for us as children of the light in any season. She says:

*Terror would very much like you to believe that darkness is winning.*

*Terror would very much like you to lie in your bed today and sigh at the deep sadness you feel.*

*Terror would very much like you to root around in your doubts about love winning.*

...

*Terror would very much NOT like you to*

*+ get up*

*+ and sit in a pew*

*+ and kneel at the cross upon which darkness hanged the Light of the World*

*+ and proclaim with your other scared sisters and brothers that the Light is still shining... in you.*

Amen 1427 wds.

---

**NO** Prayer: Dear God of promise-keeping. Help us in this season of Advent to look back to Christ's coming at Bethlehem, forward in hope to his coming in glory, and around us to see those with whom we can share your wonderful promises of salvation. Lord, strengthen us in our waiting. Amen..