

Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25:1-9
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36

Advent 1C
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
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It's the End of the World as We Know it (and I feel fine...)

"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..."

Such lovely words for this beautiful, soft, quiet holy season. Instead of sweet and gentle scripture whispering stories of a precious baby boy about to be born, we get something that feels very jarring and sort of scary too. Distress. Confusion. Fainting from fear and foreboding... I have to say that our Advent scripture readings surprise me every single year because they never, ever sound – you know - Advent-ish. Where is the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of that beautiful baby boy, where is Mary, his mother, saying “yes” to God? Where is the urging to quiet our hearts and prepare him room?

As it turns out, the readings are actually spot on. The end of the world as we know it is precisely what happens in Advent. AND the end of the world as we know it is precisely where God's promise is being born. This is profoundly important for us, particularly in the times we live right now. It often feels like the end of the world as we know it, and Advent reminds us that God's promise is being born in the midst of it all - right here in the darkness, right here in the anxiety, right here in the heart of all our distress and confusion. God's promise is being born right here and now. THAT is the promise of Advent.

And still it's hard sometimes to live in the light of God's promise when we feel surrounded by darkness. But darkness can be luminous, once our eyes adjust. Imagine walking out into the early evening on a moonless night. As your eyes adjust you begin to see the stars popping out in the sky, and there, where you thought there was only darkness there are hundreds and thousands of stars. And when you've finally stopped counting them and bring your eyes back to your more immediate surroundings, you find you can see things you never dreamed you could see in the dark.

Advent is a time we can learn to walk in the dark, a time to see what can only be seen in the dark, a time of longing and watching and waiting and noticing the many heralds of light in the darkness. Advent is a time of quiet, inward watching too, a time to prepare for a light more dazzling than we could ever imagine, the light that comes to enlighten all the world.

We need to be ready. We need to prepare. And the way we prepare is to become ever more still, ever more silent, ever more attentive to the countless sacred moments that surround us. Like the precise moment the moon comes up over the mountains. The precise moment the house wren fluffs her wings in the birdbath. The precise moment your heart lightens. There are so many ways to be ready, so many ways for our hearts to prepare him room.

Advent is a time of preparation, not just for the birth of the baby Jesus and God coming to be with us, but for the God who is with us already. It's a time to wait in the quiet and the dark, to journey inward precisely so that we can be ready to notice and to act in the outer world. It's a time of longing for the birth of the baby Jesus and longing for God's Holy Spirit to envelop us now. Advent begins the new church year, calling a sudden and certain halt to these many weeks of "ordinary time" we've been in since Pentecost. This very day launches us into new season, a new year, a brand-new beginning. In Advent, we get to begin again, and God knows we could use a fresh start. So even as we quiet ourselves, even as we watch and wait and long for God, the arrival of Advent comes with the stunning realization that God is already breaking in and everything is turning upside down. Ordinary time is over, extraordinary time is about to set in, and we need to pay some serious attention, because life as we've known it is no more. It can feel very confusing. And problematic for those of us who like to hang on tight to what we know best.

So... we can hang on tight, or we can let loose of our certainties, and know that God has in mind abundantly far more than we could ask or imagine. If life as YOU'VE known it hasn't been so great, maybe Advent feels exciting and filled with possibilities. If life as you've known it has been pretty sweet, maybe Advent's new world is unsettling for you. But ready or not, God is coming in some very surprising and unexpected ways! Not just in the manger of the Christmas story, but in the here and now of our own stories. God is making all things new... Right now. And not yet.

I think that's the tricky part. It's the "right now" and the "not yet" living together. We await the coming of the Christ child, even as we see the face of Jesus in our own grandchild. We await a world without hunger even as we bring food each week for the hungry people in our communities. We hope for a peaceful world even as we recognize the violence around us, and in our own minds and hearts. We await the Kingdom of Heaven even as we pour out God's love working for justice and peace and dignity for all. Now, and not yet. No wonder we need to be ready.

We need to be ready, to pay close attention, to be quiet, to be mindful, to be prayerful, to be truly, fully present to the promise of God's future. That's why Jesus pointed out that fig tree even as he spoke of the end of the world... he wanted us to see the reality that even in the dark, God's future is being born in the new life happening all around us. You see, the future does not

belong to the politicians or the billionaires or any of the ones who appear to have all the power. The future doesn't belong to our bosses or our spouses or even to our children. The future belongs to God, and Advent tells us so.

Today we're invited to let Advent settle into us AND to settle us. We're invited to create some stillness, to take our time, to relish the watching and the waiting. To sink into our longing for God. So be quiet. Pay attention. Be ready. There's no need to be afraid of the dark. "When all these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads" Jesus said. Stand up and raise your heads. Because when you do, you will see that God is everywhere, offering the promise of the end of the world and a whole new beginning.

We don't actually know what God's future will bring. That can fill us with anxiety, or it can fill us with hope. And as Christians, it's our job to hold hope. That's what resurrection means, you know, that the darkness can never overcome the light, that death never has the final word, that the world and all that is in it belongs to God.

Advent reminds us to be awake, to be ready, to hold hope, not just for what is to come but for everything that is happening right here, right now. We cannot allow ourselves the indulgence of despair or complacency when it feels like things are coming apart. In a world that feels dark, our job is to hold hope because holding hope in the darkness is a profound act of resistance that proclaims the Good News that God is coming, that God is here, that God will always be here. Every single day, in every prayer, every small kindness, every act of justice, God is here, hope is alive, and every single one of us has a part in it.

Jesus reminds us again and again that the future belongs to God, but even more than that, he says, our future IS God. Surely that is enough. We don't actually need to know how every big or little thing will turn out in the end – what we do know is that we can trust in the promise of God's future. The gift of Advent, this time to watch and wait in hope is a gift not to be missed. God's promise is being born right here, right now, in us and all around us. Pay attention. Make lots of space for quiet. Be still and keenly alert. Deepen your communion with the God who loves you and has promised always to be with you. The God who came to us long ago as a precious baby boy born in a stable, the God who comes to us each day in both the suffering and the kindness of humanity, the God who will continue to come to us in ways more marvelous than we could ever ask or even imagine.

I love Advent. And I think it's coming just in time. Amen.

