

Advent 1

December 2, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Jeremiah 33:14-16	Jeremiah gives a promise of Restoration; I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David.
Psalms 25:1-9	O Lord, remember me according to your love.
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13	May he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Jesus brings strength to restore faith
Luke 21:25-36	Be on guard; be alert at all times. Redemption will come.

Be on guard. Be alert. Something is happening!

Years ago NBC ran a series of commercials about their nightly news; "The world is complicated. Our job is to make sense of it. That is what we do." Isn't that special?

The truth is that daily life includes events that do not make sense. School shootings, boiling tempers in politics and in the streets of America, acts of terrorism around the world, an inability to have civil discourse anymore. In the context of all the issues that can pull us down and wear us out, there is a message in the season of Advent that offers us hope.

There is a three-dimensional meaning to the season of Advent (the Latin root *advenire* means to come); Jesus coming into the world as a human baby on Christmas Day, his offer to come into our hearts every day, and his coming back in glory at the end of the age. That tells us 'when' something is coming. Let's take a few minutes to explore 'what' is coming.

Jeremiah was a prophet of Judah around 600 BC. After King Josiah had brought reform to Israel (revitalizing the worship of God), Kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah reversed the reform, and allowed pagan worship. That nearly destroying the worship of God. At the same time, Judah was being squeezed between superpowers Egypt and Assyria. Big trouble. We definitely do NOT have an exclusive on anxious times. In the middle of corruption of faith and threat of war, Jeremiah wrote and preached the need for reform, that God would allow their defeat, but would bring Restoration and new life. And that is what happened. The first message of Advent is that our God brings us new life.

The church in Thessalonica: The 2 year old church was nervous and doubtful. They thought Jesus would be coming back right away. But now they were seeing their loved ones die, without Jesus' return. They were worried what was going to happen to those they love who died before Jesus came back. Paul assured them; Jesus will return, and those who have died will come with him. The second message of Advent is assurance that God is who He says he is; he loves us; eternal life is a reality; and Jesus will be there to bring us to him.

In Luke 21, Jesus gives a talk about the “end times”. He describes *this life* as only one step in our existence. He says that the end of the age brings redemption; **not ‘the end’**, not something unknown and scary; but redemption, which means that we will be restored into full relationship with God.

Jesus explains that this age will come to an end so that something new can begin. Something new is breaking in upon us, an “advent” that will save us from the harm that humans do to each other, and to creation.

Advent calls us to live expectantly, filling every day with activities that matter, because our life is a divine mandate;

YOUR life contributes to God’s purpose for all human life.

Jesus’ words about the coming of the Son of Man are his promise that even in the worst of times he is near us, coming “with power and great glory” (21:27). The message of Jesus’ “end-time discourse” sounds scary, but is the message of restoration; new life; assurance; hope; and redemption.

This leads us to three dimensions to Advent: Jesus’ birth on Christmas Day gives us cause to celebrate that God became human, born as a baby boy, brought into the world to be one of us, to help us understand just how much God loves us.

Jesus coming into our hearts every day, if we will receive him, is cause to celebrate that God lives inside us, re-making us every day into a new creation, making it possible for us to be more than we could ever become on our own.

Jesus coming back at the end of this age is cause to celebrate the end of wars; the end of people doing physical or psychological violence to each other; and the end of hunger and every form of suffering.

Today’s Scripture brings voices from 600 BC, 32 AD and 51 AD, telling us to hold on tightly to our faith, and to understand that **the Creator isn’t finished creating**. There is a whole new created order yet to come. I am ready. Are you ready?

Put your gift shopping, Christmas party preparations, and Christmas spirit in the context we have looked at today. We begin a new church year today; and we begin the season of Advent; reminding us that **God’s love story with humankind is about being restored to wholeness, being redeemed as God’s children, and being given new life**.

Today we all take part in the baptismal rite for Rafi Allen. We celebrate the gift that Jesus makes possible through this sacrament; a spiritual birth. What an exciting God-incident, that Rafi’s new life as a Christian young man begins on the first day of Advent – the season that personifies new things coming...

Be on guard. Be alert. Something is happening! It is Advent! Amen.