

Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Luke 21: 25-36. The Days Are Surely Coming

**Jeremiah 33: 14-16**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil 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; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

The days are surely coming, the prophet Jeremiah reminds us. When a prophet declares something, he or she is stating the obvious, not just "predicting," even when all that you and I could observe tells us otherwise. A prophet, like Jeremiah, is showing us the ultimate reality beyond what our limited human vision can see for ourselves. It is the will of God the prophet proclaims.

The Days are surely coming, when the world will be ruled by God's justice, which is God's loving mercy, and all who dwell in it will be in peace with God and with one another. The days are surely coming because God wills it for us, despite our failure to make our world conform to the will of God, in spite of the mess we have made of God's creation, for nothing can stop God from loving us into relationship with our Creator.

And when that happens, our world would be changed forever, and all that has stood in the way of our re-union with God will pass away. What comes at the end of the world as we know it, is the beginning of the world that we could have only wished for but never imagined; the world of peace, joy, and love that is beyond our imagination. That's the promise of God.

This is a message from someone who knows that the world we live in, the world as we know it, is less than the supreme goodness God wants for us. Of course, there are beauty and goodness we see in our world reflecting the love of the Creator, even hidden in the shadows of suffering, disguised as our grief... Yet our world is still under the grip of all that resist the coming of those days. How, then, are we to live? Christian life is a life of living in hope grounded in God's promise.

The prophet Jeremiah declared this centuries ago. And the Gospel writer Luke gives us the words of the righteous One whom God has caused to spring up, whom God has sent to fulfill God's promise now in the world, and to show us how to live in this world, with hope, now, while we have breath. Hear now the words of our prince of peace, Jesus the Christ, according to Luke 21: 25-36.

**Luke 21: 25-36**

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, for **the powers of the heavens will be shaken**. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, **stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**’

Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves **you can see for yourselves and know** that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

**Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life**, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon **all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things** that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’

Jesus says there will be signs of the time when God’s promise comes true, but the signs will appear to us like the world turned upside down and we will fear it. It will feel to us like an end of the world, while in truth it is the arrival of the One who comes to save the world. Have you been in that place in your life when you felt like the rug has been pulled from under your feet?

To show us how this “heavenly shake-down” is not the end but the sign of what is to come, Jesus tells the story of the fig tree. Now I’m not familiar with the growth stages of a fig tree, but from the cold winter to the warmth of the spring, from the church kitchen window right here, I’ve observed the cherry tree’s transformation from one Sunday to the next, and I could see for myself, I could feel for myself the life of the growing tree. It is not just “change” but something more; there is a sense of growth into something more vital, more beautiful, more fruitful...

Jesus said, “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.” The sign, a fig tree here and the cherry tree for me, is a sure promise that empowers me to hopefully anticipate the arrival of that which is yet to come. When our daily living is hard, when we look around the world and see suffering and pain, it is not easy to hold onto the hope that the world of peace, joy and love is yet

to come. So, Jesus has instructions for his followers. He says, take care are not to let you heart be weighed down by 1) dissipation, 2) drunkenness, 3) the worries of this life.

What do all these “lifestyles” or “life habits” have in common? We were not born into life destined for these things, but when the demands of our lives are too heavy, facing the reality feels too difficult and the life is altogether too disappointing, we retreat into these spaces. They numb our senses and protect us from pain, but in the process, they usurp our God-given ability as human creatures to fully engage in life. Life in dissipation, drunkenness, and obsessive worries, is life less than what God wants for us, and yet, Jesus name these things, because apparently, whether we are aware or not, we let our hearts be weighed down in this way, and God knows this about us.

Jesus is not condemning or shaming us when we find ourselves in these places... Your life in dissipation most likely looks a lot different than my life in dissipation... but whatever it is, this is Jesus’s words of encouragement; he says to you and me, “whatever that has hurt you, frightened you, disappointed you, those are things that pass away, but my words, my teaching, do not pass away.”

Jesus came into this world, where it is full of danger and hostility, taking a human form, and an infant at that, as vulnerable as any of us could be. Then, he grew up, true to his calling, filled with the Spirit and grounded in the knowledge of to whom he belonged and for what he was sent into this world, living not by the rules of the world but by the rule of Love, the love of God for the world. His life was the word of God to us, and it still is. This is the Christ that we prepare to welcome into our hearts today, on this first Sunday of Advent, and every day.

How is your heart doing today? Is it weighed down with the worries of your life, the strained relationship with your loved one, worries about your health, money worries. Are you nursing your scared, wounded heart in vain by things that would not bring true healing, but only a quick, temporary numbing of the pain?

If not “dissipation” and “drunkenness,” how about “despair” or even “apathy”? When we open our eyes and ears and heart to learn what is happening in the world and see the problems way too big to wrap our heads around... the conflicts between nations that seem to fire up and refuse to be put out. The patterns of the natural world that have gone wild and unhinged, wreaking havoc on the lives of all creation; what could I possibly do that would bring any meaningful change? And a life of drunkenness? Some of us may be drunken with anger and

frustration at the leaders we elected, or not elected, by the way they failed to bring solution to our life as a nation, as a world. There's a lot of fear and anger out there just about now.

And if that's the world we live in, then that's the world God has chosen to send Christ into, not to condemn the world but to save it. God knows full well the state of the world. God knows full well the confusion and fear that rule our heart. And God has made a promise to be our God, and came to us by being born into this world, and to be born and to dwell in our hearts, to save us from all that weigh down our hearts, to redirect us from following false prophets, to keep us from putting our faith, our trust in false promises, from pursuing false security; for all those things will pass away but the word of God, brought to us in the person of Jesus, will never pass away. And what is that Word but what Jesus commands us to do; to love God and to love others as ourselves; in the words of another prophet of God, Micah, to do justice, love mercy, to walk humbly with your God.

But it is hard for us, living in the world full of false hopes to lure us and to lead us astray, to hold onto to these words of the Scriptures that is the eternal Word of God, and to live according to it, So, Jesus says, in order to come through all this turmoil, "Be alert at all times, praying for the strength to live according to the Word of God that will not pass away, while things all around us passes away, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Jesus says the coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory, will follow what feels like a shake-down of the known universe. But Jesus is not here speaking of utter destruction of the world, but that "the powers of the heavens will be shaken." And who might be doing the "shaking"? The everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. Even when the world seems to be losing its ground and coming apart, God is re-ordering the world, and God's purpose is not destruction of what God has created but our redemption.

And that is how, for all who live on the face of this earth, our lives are bookended with the arrival of God in the baby Jesus in Bethlehem on one end, and the coming again of the risen Christ, the Son of Man, one the other end. Between these two comings of God into our lives, our lives are secure. And we are to be alert, praying for the strength to live our lives between these bookends while loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus' invitation to live each day with hope, for the days are surely coming. Amen.