

Natalie W. Bell
 December 2, 2018
 First Sunday of Advent

Be Ready

Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36

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. 15 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. 16 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."

I want to share this from The Message translation too:

Watch for this: The time is coming'—when I will keep the promise I made to the families of Israel and Judah. When that time comes, I will make a fresh and true shoot sprout from the David-Tree. He will run this country honestly and fairly. He will set things right. That's when Judah will be secure and Jerusalem live in safety. The motto for the city will be, "God Has Set Things Right for Us.

Like I told the kids, today is the ***First Sunday*** of the 4 week season of Advent. Advent means ***coming***—and it's about ***two different arrivals***:

The arrival of the infant Jesus in Bethlehem,
 and the arrival of our Savior Jesus,
 when he comes again to redeem all creation.

Advent is when we ***prepare ourselves for both arrivals***.

Advent is about ***paying attention, and being ready and alert***.
 ready and alert to find Jesus—right now, and at the end.

In ***Luke 21*** Jesus is talking about his ***second coming***,
 Just before he goes to the cross to die.

His words may sound a bit mysterious to us,
 but the first audience would have heard echoes of the Book of Daniel...

They would have known that these are words about the ***Savior*** of the world,
 coming to redeem the world.

To some, such words final judgment are ***scary***.

The famous "Left Behind" book series was built on passages like this, emphasizing the fear and terror of people being snatched up at the end of time, and others being 'left behind'.

But actually both Luke and Jeremiah are *words of HOPE*.
 Especially to people who face *any kind of suffering*.
 Because today's readings are about a *day when God will make all things right*.
 And Jesus will bring *justice for all*.

The Message Bible says it so well: Watch for this: The time is coming'—... He will run this country honestly and fairly. He will set things right. ... The motto for the city will be, "God Has Set Things Right for Us.

Mary sings something similar in her *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55:
 Listen to her words about Jesus:

*His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,*

So the question for us now is,
do we have hope for the day when God will make all things right?
 I sure do!
 I've got to say that when the holidays roll around,
 I am more than *ready for Jesus* to come back just any time now,
 and make things right,
 what about you?

Jeremiah's words are *hopeful*—with good reason.
 The original audience were God's people—
 who had been captured, tortured, and taken away from their homeland and Temple
 and everything familiar—
 They were *exiled* by force, from Jerusalem, to Babylon.

The prophet Jeremiah was given the arduous task
 of *warning God's people* about their impending exile....

and then giving them *a word of hope to sustain them til it ended.*
 In fact, God asked Jeremiah to buy a piece of land before the exile,
 To remind the people that God would one day restore them to their homeland!

The *exiles needed to hear* Jeremiah's words of hope!
 They needed to know that God would make everything right one day....
 just like the *followers of Jesus* needed to hear that message.
 Just like *WE NEED to hear God's word of hope today, right?*

Jesus spoke several times about *being ready* for the end,
 like the ten *bridesmaids* having their lamps of oil ready,
 and the separating of the *sheep and the goats* for final judgment.
 Jesus said he would come again, judge all people,
 and redeem all creation.

And, as Christians, we hopefully look ahead to that *during Advent!*

This First Sunday of Advent is the *New Year's Day* of the church calendar!
 It's why the readings are all about *HOPE*.
 about the *FUTURE*.
 About the *One who has come, and is coming!*

That's what's so *unique about Christian preparation for Christmas.*
 The season of Advent reminds us of the *end* of time,
 So that we'll be truly *prepared for all* time.

It's all very *counter-cultural*—but it has so much meaning and purpose.
 There's no silver bells or decking the halls,
 because it's *a different kind of preparation*
 than the world does for December 25th.

These are words about living in an *in-between time*,
 aware of Jesus *with us*, but waiting for Jesus to *come again*.
 These are words about being *alert and ready*,
 because *no one knows* when Jesus will come again.
 People can speculate that the end is near...
 but really no one knows when the end is coming...it's not ours to know.

All we are called to do is *be ready*.
 And have *HOPE* that He is coming—now and again.

We can hope because *He is with us right now!*
 That's what they called Jesus—*Emmanuel—which means God With Us.*
 We can celebrate Christmas,
 Because *we can see* Jesus in our daily lives,
 if we have the eyes to see Him!

To me, this is so *much more meaningful* than decorating or giving gifts.
 It means that I have my *eyes and ears* peeled for Jesus---
 I never know when I will see or hear Him in my life.

Sometimes I *hear Him* in the voice of a loved one,
 Or in time spent with one of you.
 Sometimes I *see Him* in the eyes of a needy person,
 Or someone who is walking through a dark valley.

Because Christmas can be such a hard time of year,
 We need this *HOPE*—hope that we will see Jesus.
 We need the encouragement to *be ready, and alert—for Jesus.*
 Not just the latest gift ideas!

And we need to know that it's ok to long for *justice and righteousness.*
 a day *when Jesus makes everything right!*

We see so much *pain and suffering* in our world.
 We can find news of a terror attack or threat,
 a shooting, a disaster—somewhere in the world—every day.
 It's *sad, and scary.*

So, what if let God *replace* our *sadness, and anxiety...*
 Even the *sorrow* so many of us feel at Christmas,
 With *HOPE?*
 The *Hope of seeing and hearing and feeling* Jesus?

Is that something *we could all ask for* this Christmas season?

Famous Christian theologian Jurgen Moltmann
 wrote a book called *Theology of Hope*, and he said this:
*“I tried to present the Christian hope no longer as such an opium of beyond but
 rather as the divine power that makes us alive in this world”*

Wow.

Christian hope is *the divine power that makes us alive in this world.*

The Theology of Hope. Jurgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, 1st ed (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), pg. 4.

Isn't that great news?

Christmas can be challenging to say the least.

It's all too easy to find ourselves *feeling down*

Because we are surrounded by images of happiness,

And singing, and eating, and gifts,

But the reality is that *we are suffering*—

in our hearts, our homes, our world.....

It's *hard to reconcile* the happy songs and cheerful décor

With the reality that *life is a mess*---even at Christmas.

If you've got relatives like mine, *ESPECIALLY* at Christmas!

And *Jesus knows that.*

Jesus knows *just how much we need a message of HOPE*

As we prepare for Christmas.

As Christians, hope makes us alive,

And it *helps us follow Jesus!*

It reminds us what Christmas is all about.

Isn't it hope that *empowers* us

to feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger, and visit the sick or the prisoners,

like *Matthew 25* urges us to do before the final judgment?

I read this week,

That we are called to live lives of faith,

active waiting in the meantime,

because of the One

who holds us in the end time.

Wesley D. Avram, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 1, pg. 22.

Active waiting.

Being ready to meet *our Hope*—

Jesus Christ—now and in the end.

Isn't that a *great Advent message?*

One of my all time favorite '*be ready*' stories is about Robby Robins, an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war.

After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately pull his crew together and fly his plane home.

They flew across the ocean to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania. They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—

"Welcome Home Dad!"

How did they know?

No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn't expected to leave so quickly. Robins relates, "When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, 'Daddy!' Susan came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, and a crisp yellow dress.

'How did you know?' I asked.

'I didn't,' she answered through tears of joy.

'Once we knew the war was over, *we knew you'd be home one of these days.*

We knew you'd try to surprise us, *so we were ready every day.*"

Lee Eclov, in the sermon "Heaven," PreachingToday.com

Friends hear the ***Good News of the Gospel for Advent:***

Jesus is coming one day, to ***make all things right,***

And we need to ***be ready.***

And in the meantime,

Let's open our eyes and ears to find Him right now.

Because He is our ***HOPE.***

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.