

“Look for God’s Time” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 2, 2018, First Sunday of Advent
Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

It’s the most wonderful time of the year! I can just hear Andy William singing this song on his TV Christmas special years ago. Our society paints an idyllic picture of the Christmas season with smiling families gathered around the Christmas tree, children opening beautifully wrapped, expensive gifts while the adults look on. The holiday season, as society calls it, is a time of joy and love.

As you heard the scripture from Luke read today, did you wonder to yourself, “what is all this doom and gloom about? Jesus is talking about men fainting from terror and apprehensive of what is coming. Aren’t we supposed to be talking about the birth of Jesus and preparing for that? What happened to Christmas and the baby Jesus – and all the smiling adults and children around the Christmas tree? Good question! I’m glad you asked.

This is the first Sunday in Advent. The four Sundays that precede Christmas make up the Season of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation. A time to prepare our hearts and minds for Christ’s birth – and Christ’s return to the world. The scriptures from both Jeremiah and Luke prepare us for Christ’s birth and for Christ’s return. How do they do that?

It all has to do with time. Those who follow Christ operate in a different time zone, so to speak, from the rest of the world. While society looks forward to Christmas, Christians also look forward to Christ’s return. Our society looks for immediate gratification. Christ-followers are called to be more patient.

Do you remember how Luke begins his story of Jesus’ birth? **In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree** Luke sets Jesus’ birth within history, within the past – the time when Caesar was in power and a census was to be taken. Luke is looking back. Jeremiah words are similar, **In those days and at that time.** But Jeremiah’s words are not about past history, his words turn us toward the future. Jeremiah is looking to the future. **The days are surely coming, says the Lord when I fulfill the promise . . .** At this time of year, we’re not thinking about anything past December 25th, yet Jeremiah is telling us to focus on a time in the future when God will execute justice and righteousness in the land.

We could us a little justice and righteousness in the land. No, we could us a lot of justice and righteousness in the land! In our day, many of us see justice and righteous missing from our country and our world.

I’m not saying Christmas is not a great time to look back and be nostalgic or to be in the moment and enjoy. As Christ-followers, we celebrate God’s goodness at Christmas with the birth of Jesus, the gift of God’s love to each of us. But Jeremiah is calling us to look forward to a time in the future to a day that when God will initiate a new beginning, when God will make all things new.

When Jeremiah wrote these words he had been imprisoned by the king for continually prophesying that God was going to punish Jerusalem because the people were not trusting God. At that time, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies who wanted to conquer the little country. The king was doing all he could to form alliances with worldly powers and neglecting Jeremiah’s words that God was the one with the power to protect Jerusalem. The king must trust God, Jeremiah said. But the king did not, and the people were taken into captivity.

Those living in Jerusalem felt the situation was hopeless. In the middle of this hopelessness comes the hopeful words of Jeremiah that I read today. **Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety.** Jeremiah was telling them that there would be a time in the future when God would restore their fortunes. Which God did. In God's time, not worldly time, God restored the kingship to David's lineage through Jesus. Jeremiah writes that God will **cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.** As Christians, we believe that righteous branch is Jesus, who, as we talked about last week, is king of all creation. In God's time, God fulfilled Jeremiah's prophesy by sending Jesus to be king of the Hebrew people as well as our king. And Jesus the king will return as Jesus tells us in today's scripture from Luke.

As you know, Jesus ran into the same problems in Jerusalem as Jeremiah did. Both Jeremiah and Jesus stood in the streets of Jerusalem announcing its destruction. Both of them were correct. Jerusalem was destroyed by invading armies in 587 BC in Jeremiah's time and again in 70 AD following Jesus' prediction.

Abraham Heschel said, a prophet is one who knows what time it is. Jeremiah knew it was time for the people to give up their false hopes that worldly powers would save them. Jesus knew it was time for the worldly powers to try and destroy his message of hope and love.

Do you know what time it is? Our texts for today tell us that no matter how devastating our experience, it is neither permanent nor ultimate for as Jesus says, **your redemption is drawing near.**

Do you know what time it is? You and I may not like the times we are living in. Often, when we are in a situation, we have difficulty looking beyond it. We often panic about the immediate present. We are concerned about our personal survival. Our scripture lessons today from Jeremiah and Luke, draw our attention to God's promises for a future of justice and righteousness and tell us it's time to hope, to seriously hope, and to share that hope with others.

Our world draws us in to the immediacy of things. The world's time line runs from one event to the other. Right now, the focus is on December 25, Christmas. After that, we're looking for the next commercial holiday – Valentine's Day. Does getting drawn into the immediacy of things distract us from paying attention to God's time? I believe it does. What are we to do while we wait for God's timing? Jesus tells us to **Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength.**

Perhaps these scriptures from Jeremiah and Luke are read on this first Sunday in Advent to startle us, to get us out of our everyday patterns, to make us stop and think about what is important. We need to pay attention to God's timing and not be distracted by the world's immediacy.

What time is it? It's time to be alert, to wake up and get moving, to look at our lives from the inside and the outside. It's time to shed our lethargy and to look for the coming of the new leaves on the fig tree. It's time to resist injustice and work for justice with more passion and concern. It's time to be alert to God's time.

God is in control. We can't help but believe that when we read the Old and New Testaments. Just remember that it's not our job to bring about God's future with our sheer force of will. It is our job to listen to God so that we may become partners with God in the advent of God's new reality. It is our job to speak words of hope and promise in a world full of fear and uncertainty. It is our job to name those places in our lives and society that are at odds with God's justice and righteousness.

During this season of Advent, we celebrate Christ's birth and anticipate Christ's coming again to earth. As we prepare our hearts and minds for celebrating Christ's birth at Christmas, don't forget to prepare for Christ's return. And take time to check in – are you operating on God's time or the world's time?