

Big Questions, Big Answers

1 Advent C

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First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

In the Old Testament, “righteousness” often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin & in having mercy. In today’s reading, Jerusalem’s future name—“The Lord is our righteousness”—proclaims that God is even now working salvation for Israel.

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel & the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days & at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, who shall execute justice & righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved & Jerusalem will live in safety. & this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

God will fulfill God’s purposes &, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, & terror, but God’s people shall be given strength to stand boldly & receive God’s promised redemption.

[Jesus said:] ²⁵“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, & the stars, & on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea & the waves. ²⁶People will faint from fear & foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see ‘the Son-of-Man coming in a cloud’ with power & great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up & raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” ²⁹Then Jesus told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree & all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves & know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the dominion of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven & earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁴“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down w/ dissipation & drunkenness & the worries of this life, & that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, & to stand before the Son-of-Man.”

Introduction

Advent is about the “coming days.” God’s people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these 4 weeks. The ancients awaited a “righteous Branch to spring up for David.” Jesus’ contemporaries hoped for the time “to stand before the Son of Man.” With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a 2nd coming, & the advent of Christ in word & supper.

Season of Advent

Although the historical record is sketchy, it appears that our Advent arose out of a season of fasting to prepare for baptisms at Epiphany. By the 6th century, an eschatological (end times) emphasis was present. Our Advent comprises the 4 Sundays before Christmas. Each year, the 1st Sunday deals with our readiness for divine judgment, the 2nd Sunday the ministry of John the Baptist, the 3rd Sunday the Baptist’s call to a repentant life, & only on the 4th Sunday a narrative concerning the birth of Jesus. God comes, in the past in the history of Israel & the incarnation of Jesus, in the present in the word & sacrament of each Sunday & in the sufferings of our time, & in the future at the end of all things. The lectionary appoints readings to fit this pattern, & its tone stands in stark contrast to our society’s weeks of preparation for Christmas. Liturgical advice to keep a meaningful Advent without a December-long celebration of Christmas is meant not to be a kill-joy, but to awake our longing for the surprising ways that God comes to us. We mean to be a people who know what time it is & are willing to wait for what will come—a people who do not sing Easter hymns during Lent nor Christmas hymns in Advent....doing this is difficult & counter-cultural.

Overview - Don’t Wait for the Kingdom—See It

As Advent begins, we look forward to the celebration of Jesus’ 1st coming to the world in the light of a text that promises his final coming. We, like the gospel writer, Luke, live in the time between these two “advents” of Jesus. Today’s gospel gives us guidance on how to live faithfully as we wait for Jesus to return. However, in this in-between time, it is easy for us to become distracted & lose sight of the promises of Jesus. Daily tasks & routines can lull us into apathy. Ease & success can allow us to ignore our spiritual needs. Struggles, setbacks, & disappointments can cause us to lose hope & fall into despair. But Jesus tells us we should not feel beaten down or defeated by the struggles of this world, but instead “stand up & raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Jesus goes on to say that there will be signs, signs of new life & growth, such as the sprouting of a leaf on a fig tree in the

summertime. These signs are perceptible to us here & now. These signs help us know that God's kingdom is coming. In fact, they remind us that in Jesus, God's kingdom has already come near, & Jesus words will not pass away until this kingdom has fully come. We should live with our eyes focused on today's signs that demonstrate God's reign & trust that Jesus' redemption of the world will one day be complete.

Testimony

The issue of timing was important to those to whom Luke wrote, which is perhaps why he is intentionally vague about when the coming of the Son of Man will happen. Instead, Luke tells readers that just as new growth on a fig tree is hard to miss, the coming of God's kingdom will be noticeable to the Christian community. A sermon that highlights this aspect of today's gospel might ask hearers to reflect on the kingdom of God in their midst. Invite worshipers to answer the question "Where have you seen God in your life this week?"

Illustration

In Luke, there is a sense of the "now" & the "not yet." This concept may be brought to life by having hearers reflect on their to-do list this season. When will they know Christmas has arrived? Are there things they feel they need to accomplish in order for it to truly be "here"? How do these preparations at times prevent us from being in the "now" & recognizing God's presence in, with, & among us?

Connections with Creation

Portrayal of the end times includes frightening predictions of social breakdown & cosmic turmoil. These images resonate with our own day as we confront the rising seas, floods, droughts, wildfires, & social dislocation & suffering caused by a rapidly heating climate. Should Christians settle for a helpless shrug of the shoulders as we consider the climate crisis? Today Jesus summons us not to faint from fear & foreboding, nor to let our love grow cold, but rather to stay alert for the small but telling signs that God is in our midst, bringing forth something new. Just as the branch of a fig tree sprouts its first, soft leaves, assuring us that summer's abundance is near, so Jesus urges us to trust that even in the midst of chaos, violence, & endings, God's

kingdom is drawing near. What next steps can we take to live sustainably & to welcome God's kingdom?

[Luke 21:25-36](#)

Luke was written in the late 80s by an expert storyteller who built upon Mark, depicts Jesus as the forgiving Savior of the world, & includes many of the most beloved passages about Jesus. Luke's emphases include: Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish messianic hopes; Jesus welcoming Gentiles into his movement; God's care for especially the poor & the lowly; & the Spirit of God empowering first Jesus, & in Luke's second volume titled the Acts of the Apostles, the church throughout the Mediterranean world. The identification of the author with the beloved physician (Col. 4:14) is now disputed. In 21:34-36, Luke expanded on the apocalypse in Mark by urging believers to watch: the horrific eschaton is indeed coming. Perhaps the evangelist chose to stress watchfulness since the coming of the Son of Man seemed to be so delayed. The reading calls us to join the Christians of the late 1st century, wishing for the end of all evil & sorrow & for the coming of the joyous reign of Christ. Christians believe that Christ has already come, is coming today in word & sacrament, & will come at the end of all things. Like a tree of life, the fig tree is already full of leaves.

[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

The book of Jeremiah, which took shape after Jeremiah's death in 586 bce, chronicles his adventures & records his messages & that of later prophets that although God punished the people for their disobedience, God would eventually bring the people back from their exile, rebuild Jerusalem, & restore the Davidic monarchy. Chapter 33 is described as God's word spoken while Jeremiah was imprisoned. Verses 14-16 are a doublet of 22:5-6. It was common in the ancient Near East for monarchies to be depicted as a tree of life that yielded safety & productivity for the people. The Jeremiah passage is chosen as a condensed form of the gospel: the Lord will come to restore justice among the people. It came to be that Christians called Jesus their Lord, the divinely-sent descendant of King David.

(Thanks to Sundays&Seasons.com)

This ADVENT season at LCR we are looking at BIG Questions & BIG Answers in our faith. Advent is an in-between time: Jesus has secured and confirmed the promises of

God yet the world continues in much the same way it has for centuries. How as people of faith are we to understand this? People have been invited to share and submit faith questions and have them addressed as much as possible as part of the sermons in Advent. Tune in to see how the conversations go. The format for each of the 4 weeks will be similar: A brief explanation of the emphasis of the day and scriptures will be shared and then we'll proceed to addressing the BIG Questions. Keep in mind theologians are highly learned, aware of these questions and write books about these topics and even have some differing views. There is often a wide gap in understanding present between those who stand on a Conservative Evangelical foundation of faith and those who have more of a Classic Main-line perspective. Until we see God face-to-face and not in a mirror dimly we have to be content with the spiritual struggles that are part of wrestling with these questions. Faith does give us some information, handles, directions, guidance and always hope as we address these topics.

Submit yours! Just send them to Admin@My LCR.org to be sorted and formatted. Pastor will try and address as many as possible.