

Advent 1C The Rev. Dr. Darcy Williams @ Emmanuel Chestertown
 Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16 Psalm 25: 1-9 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

28 November 2021
 Luke 21:25-36

Thanksgiving has come and gone. The stores and shops are in full Christmas array. But today, Christians around the world are reminded that Christmas is more than a commercial holiday, and these four leading up to Christmas are a time of preparation, a time of waiting. Advent.

It is that time when we are called to slow down just a bit, to take time for ourselves and our families in the midst of the busyness of the holiday season. It is a time to count our blessings, and wrap ourselves in the warm and loving embrace of a God who loves us deeply and completely. Sometimes it seems that the world speeds by, and another year passes so rapidly that we are caught unaware and unprepared. We watch our children and grandchildren grow from infants to toddlers to teens to adults before our very eyes, and wonder where the time has gone. We look at the world spinning around us, at the constant barrage of news filled with violence, anger, fear, and just plain bad behavior, and wonder if the world has gone crazy and is spinning toward the apocalypse. Super storms, coastal flooding, wildfires, and other evidence of climate change compounded by nearly two years of living in the midst of a global pandemic with all of uncertainties has made this seem even more of a reality.

And so on this 1st Sunday of Advent 2021 we come together to light the first candle of the Advent wreath, the candle of hope and join the psalmist who prays: *Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.*

It is the poetic prayer of one who has known the complexities, the downs and ups, of life and maintains a steadfast trust in God, knowing that God's ways are ways of truth, light, and salvation. God's ways are the ways that comfort those in distress, and soothe the ills of the world. For the Hebrew people living in captivity and exiled in a foreign land, the psalmist's words brought hope and solace to a people tired of being fearful and oppressed.

Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah spoke words of hope, promise, and salvation. When it seemed that God had forgotten about them, the prophet spoke offering comfort and hope in time of despair, fear, and loss: *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. . . I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

Presbyterian minister and preacher Elizabeth Achtemeier once wrote: *God is working toward a goal. God is on the move, constantly active, constantly pressing forward to the time when his kingdom has come in its fullness and his rule is acknowledged by every living creature. God began the inbreaking of the kingdom in the person of his Son, and he will bring in the kingdom in its fullness when that Son returns to earth.*ⁱ

Advent is both a time of “already, but not yet”. A time of living our Christian faith as followers of Jesus while at the same time waiting, watching, preparing, and letting God lead us in truth and righteousness toward that time when God's reign of peace and love will be perfected on earth as it is in heaven. It is a time for resetting our course, recommitting ourselves to God and to

following God's paths. *Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.*

In today's Epistle we hear Paul's words of encouragement to the early Christian church in Thessalonica. He tells them of his great love for them and how encouraged he is because of their love and support even as they are being isolated and persecuted by their former friends and neighbors as well as by the Roman authorities. He prays *"may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, . . . And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness."* It is a prayer filled with the hope of the season, filled with the blessings of God for those feeling lost and alone. It is a prayer that calls on the early Christians to pick up that mantle of light embodied by the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and surround themselves with it, trusting in God's promises.

Jesus came into the world, a vulnerable and helpless infant, whose family struggled to find welcome, and then fled to a foreign land to avoid genocide at the hands of a ruthless king. He lived a life of simplicity and ministered to all in need. He responded to whatever life threw at him with an unquenchable, confident optimism and faith in God. And he commanded us not to fear, but to live in hope. He spoke.

The worlds that Jeremiah, the psalmist, Jesus, and Paul lived in were not all that different from today. Their worlds knew poverty, hunger, sickness, and disease. Their worlds faced the fears of wars, violence, oppression, and natural disasters. But into all of these worlds God spoke words of hope, promise, and love to a broken and fearful world. God speaks those words to us today. God promises justice and righteousness, redemption and eternal salvation.

Like Paul, we pray for ourselves, for each other, and for the world, we join our voices in hope as we pray, *may the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all, . . . And may he so strengthen our hearts in holiness "*

These weeks of Advent are a gift. A time of hope. A path well marked. A gift of God's mantle of light and the promise of a future of justice, righteousness and peace. An opportunity to become the people God has called us to be, and the light that shines in the darkness.

This is a new year in the church calendar. Tomorrow is a new day.

Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.
Amen

ⁱ Achtemeier, Elizabeth. "Luke 21:25-36." *Interpretation* 48, no. 4 (October 1994): 401–4.