

Advent 1: HOPE

Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36 [MW18-39]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka & Wellsford, Sunday 02 December 2018

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.*

So spoke the prophet Jeremiah to a people who were disillusioned and dispirited

- a people whose homeland was under the control of powerful enemies for Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins
- a people who thought God had deserted them

Imagine the Beehive in Wellington a heap of rubble

- Richard Seddon's statue smashed
Parliament grounds vandalised
- imagine this church building smouldering embers
our homes looted, families split up
a foreign army controlling everything
- and we have some idea of what things were like when Jeremiah spoke

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah*

- like water to a parched land
these words gave God's people something they desperately, desperately needed
- hope

That's a lot of what this "Advent" season is about: hope

- behold the days are coming ...
at Christmas God breaks into our world and into our lives
in a totally new and unexpected way
- so these four weeks of Advent are a journey towards that great event
a journey of hope

Our first gospel reading for Advent is from Luke chapter 21

- what did you make of it?
strange things happening to the sun, moon and stars
the scary roaring of the sea and raging tides
- people fainting from fear
powers in the sky being shaken
- and then clouds and power and glory ...

Sure seems a strange passage to read on Advent Sunday

- when we are looking towards the coming of the 'Prince of Peace'
didn't sound very 'peaceful' did it?

This 'Prince of Peace' was born to humble Hebrew parents

- in a little out of the way town, in a stable
the signs accompanying his birth were all very peaceful
angels sang and shepherds visited

Yet what Luke writes in today's gospel seems like it would be more at home in Star Wars movie!

- laser lights shooting everywhere in a blazing spectrum
deafening surround sound echoing
- special effects over the top and out of control
beyond your wildest imaginings ...

But we read it today because it is a sign of our hope

- that in the midst of our world completely falling apart
that even when the most terrible things happen
- we can look to God with confidence
and know that Jesus is coming in power and glory

When the Hebrew Christians of the first century

- saw Jerusalem destroyed by the conquering Romans ...
when Roman Africa with its old traditions of Christian civilisation
fell before the invading Vandals ...
- when the lights went out all over Europe ...
this passage from Luke's gospel gave hope

On countless past occasions of disillusion and disaster

- this passage has been a light of hope for the people of God
at the very darkest hour, when it seemed all human hope was gone
God would step in and turn tragedy to triumph

So as we today read and consider this passage of scripture

- we remember all those people throughout the ages
who have been sustained by the hope it contains
- people whose world and whose lives may have been very different to ours
but who nevertheless share something with us: hope
- hope that: *behold the days are coming ...*

I don't know about you, but if there wasn't any hope, I probably wouldn't be here

- I mean, there wouldn't be any point would there
there wouldn't be any point to a lot of things we do
- without hope

If I didn't have this hope

- I'd probably have done and continue doing
quite a few of the things Luke warns against in the gospel
- become occupied with too much feasting and drinking
and with the worries of this life
- without hope I'd have to try to get the best I could out of the things of this world
pin everything on fame, fortune, pleasure, position, power
- trying to grab as much as I could
while carefully protecting what was mine
making myself as secure and as comfortable as possible

worrying as little as I could about anything or anyone else
Doesn't sound like much of a world

- not the sort of world I'd want to leave to my children and grandchildren ...
- I want them to have a future something to look forward to
- a hope to share

We, the people of God, have just such a hope

- hope which gives meaning and purpose and direction to our lives
hope that says God is in control
- hope which says God is not remote, not pulling strings in the background
hope that says God is near

In our gospel reading Jesus says:

Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near

Your redemption is drawing near

- so near that God comes into our world, in a baby born in a stable, in Bethlehem

Your redemption is drawing near

- hope that says Jesus came because his Father believed the world was worth it
hope that says God continues to come into our world and be very near
- hope that says in Jesus' birth God's power has already broken loose in this world and nothing can stand in the way of his final triumph
- behold the days are coming ...

Without hope – life becomes a drudgery

- without hope, the people perish
with hope there can be life and love and laughter
- with hope we can dance and sing in celebration
what ever, no matter what!

Advent is the time to stand up and lift our heads because our redemption draws near

- because at Christmas we see these things happening
in the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ

As we do this, we light / have lit our first Advent Candle [light candle]

- the candle of hope
which encourages us to put our hope in pride of place
- this candle also reminds us of Luke's other warning in today's gospel:
"Watch at all times", "Be alert", "Keep a constant watch"
- for the signs of this hope which are all around us

"Watch" for the signs of Christ's coming

- "Watch" for what Christ's coming means in our lives

“Watch” for opportunities to help others to see and share the hope we have
Today we begin a journey
- a journey of hope, a journey towards the light
so I’m going to read a poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, titled “Practice Hope”

*Dare to practice hope.
Dare to let the assurance steal upon you
that something is coming,
something greater,
deeper, not merely more,
but more so.*

*This is not cheap optimism
that can be bought in any market,
not a careful figuring of odds
that can always be beat,
nor mindless abandon.*

*I mean attentiveness to the
dense but dappled energy
that rises within. I mean willingness
to be taken up,
to be wielded deftly in this rough world
by an art that is beyond you.*

*You are a thread in a tapestry
too large for you ever to see...
Practice hope... and then only afterward,
will you know that miracle of which
already you are a living sign.*

Today we join with all those who looked to God for hope
- we look for the hope that comes into our world and our lives anew this Christmas
Christ is our hope, the light that overcomes our darkness
- Christ came
Christ comes
Christ will come

For sure, this hope is with us always, throughout the whole year
- but on this, the first Sunday of Advent,
we take out our hope from our treasure bag
- maybe some of us need to rummage around a bit
but I assure you it’s there
- so take out your hope, dust it off
get out the ‘Brasso’, give your hope a really good polish, and set it in pride of place
so that this coming week you can do what the poem says: practice hope
- look for signs of hope around you
point them out, share them

You yourself be a beacon of hope highlighting God who is with us
- and who is coming to be with us even more

for behold the days are coming ...