

**Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent**  
**Texts: Jeremiah 33: 14-16 and Luke 21: 25-36**  
**Rev. Dr. David N. Young**

Happy New Year!

Our new church year begins today with the first Sunday in Advent, and like the beginning of each new year, this is a time of anticipation and expectation

And there is something energizing about anticipation and expectation isn't there?

As with the beginning of each new year, we imagine how we might "start anew" with something we've put off or longed to begin

To be sure, anticipation and expectation can bring hope

One can think of a child waiting for Christmas morning

Or an engaged couple anticipating their wedding day

Or perhaps a graduation, the birth of a child, a first job, or a long-awaited vacation

These times of expectation and anticipation bring with them hopes and dreams, and foster within us an energy and excitement

Yet, at other times, anticipation and expectation can bring frustration, fear, and apprehension

Waiting upon a medical diagnosis, or longing for that elusive new job

Anticipating a tense gathering with friends or family, or wondering if you'll have enough money to make it through the month

Preparing to leave for an extended deployment overseas, or walking onto the mental health floor to see a loved one

These moments of anticipation and expectation foster energy, yes, but often an unsettling energy of concern

Still, while the world around us has already moved into Christmas mode, we in the Church are going to wait;

We do so as a Christian discipline, yes; yet we also do so as a reminder that amidst whatever apprehension we may be experience, there is always hope!

The Advent season, paradoxically, serves a dual purpose; it expects the Second Coming of Jesus, while anticipating and participating in the celebration of His birth

Advent is both future expectation and present anticipation; all wrapped up nicely into one beautifully decorated seasonal bow

And it is amidst this paradox that the season of Advent is its most alluring

We are both end-time people, with one eye focused on the future fulfillment of Jesus' return, and meantime people; with the other eye on the grocery list, the newspaper, and the pre-Christmas sales

If we are honest, both eyes generally move more toward meantime issues I suspect; and perhaps naturally so

For most of us, the daily personal concerns and struggles of life and faith can leave little room for contemplating the second coming of Jesus, except perhaps when we roll our eyes at apocalyptic street preachers

Yet, Jesus' words today remind us to "be alert" and to "be on guard so that our hearts are not weighed down"

And, oh, how our hearts can become weighed down

Uncertainty runs rampant these days

Inside our political system, amidst world affairs, among apparent deep divisions within our society, in our personal struggles and health issues, within our churches, and our local communities

Because of the gnawing anxiety that surrounds us, we may find ourselves on edge and not very concerned about being alert or keeping awake to what God is up to

This, however, would be a shame; because Advent shares a message that is exactly what we need in anxious times

We need look no further than our lesson from Jeremiah, to hear sustaining words of hope and promise

Jeremiah reads, “The days are surely coming ... when I will fulfill the promise I made to Israel ... I will cause a righteous branch to spring up from David ... in those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.”

These words, as we Christians interpret them, speak of Jesus, of the line of David, as the anticipated and expected Messiah

Yet, what is so poignant and powerful about Jeremiah's words is that:

- 1) it was Jeremiah who was speaking them, and
- 2) when he spoke them to the people

Jeremiah, you see, spends most of his time chastising the people for their unfaithfulness and anticipates and expects their eventual downfall

And the downfall comes. The people are taken away into exile, a defeated nation. The people must wrestle with their own sin and shame. And they begin to doubt their God.

Yet, instead of saying, "I told you so", Jeremiah becomes an arbiter of hope

Jeremiah comforts the people whom he previously condemned

Amidst national and cultural calamity, Jeremiah brings a balm for their wounds

He reminds the people that amidst their shame, sorrow, and suffering that YHWH will practice fidelity to them

Jeremiah reminds the people that God will restore their nation and will remain their God

And what Jeremiah anticipates and expects happens

The Hebrew people do return from exile as renewed and reenergized people of faith

Jeremiah reminded them, and reminds us today, that ours is the God who promises reconciliation and hope always, especially when things look bleakest

Because of what God has done and because of who God promises yet to be, we can dare to trust that the Kingdom of God reigns as fully in the here and now as it will in the hereafter

To be sure, we trust that Christ will come again in fullness and glory

And it is this end-time promise of grace, for us and for our world, that allows for a meantime response of faith

We can dare to trust that Christ will and does come among us now;

to bring peace amidst war, to heal brokenness,  
to shine light into our darkness, to foster hope when  
hopelessness abounds, and to reconcile shattered faith  
and broken lives

When Jesus says, “Be alert”, don’t hear this as a threat

Instead, hear it as a call; a life-giving and life-changing call to faithful, tenacious patience

Be alert as the love reconciles and renews NOW

Be alert as light shines amidst darkness NOW

Be alert to where hope invades sadness NOW

Be alert when peace transforms hearts and minds NOW

We may not know what our future holds, but we can dare to trust who holds that future

So, walk with eyes wide open into this new year

And be alert!

For, graciously, prayerfully, thankfully, Jesus is coming!

Amen