

1st December 2024 – Morning Service

Jill Martin

Advent Candle Liturgy

Advent dawns with lights strung high and music everywhere,
Sights and smells abound around,
Senses assaulted and confused, O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

Amid the lists and cards and gifts,
Amid the pleas and "please can we",
Amid the chaos of the world, O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

Let's seek to see and seek to hear.
Let's seek to feel and seek to know.
Let's seek to find peace and love. O hush the noise,
Let's hear the angels sing.

Call to Worship

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it.
Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.

Collect

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility: that, on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns in you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

StF 169 – Come thou long expected Jesus

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| 1) Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free,
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee. | 3) Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring. |
| 2) Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart. | 4) By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne. |

Charles Wesley

Prayer of Adoration

Glory be to you, Lord God, King of the universe; Glory be to you, Lord God, dwelling in light and majesty;
Glory be to you, Lord God, beyond our highest thoughts; Glory be to you, Lord God, giver of light and life,
Glory be to you from the company of heaven who have seen you face to face;
Glory be to you from your people on earth who have seen your salvation.
Glory be to you, Lord God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Almighty Lord, in Jesus you have called us to walk as children of the light but we have preferred our own way, the way of darkness. We have not been willing to let the light of Christ into every part of our lives, we have not been willing to respond with whole hearted obedience and total dedication. Forgive us because we find it so easy to profess faith but hard to translate that into action, because we say so much but do so little. By your renewing love, grant us assurance of pardon and strength to live up to our calling; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

StF 706 – Longing for light

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| 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. | 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. |
| Ch) <i>Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.</i> | 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. |
| 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. | 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. |

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Reading: Jeremiah 33: 14-16

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.”

Reflection¹

On this first Sunday of Advent, one cannot read the prophecy of a “righteous Branch” springing up for David in anything but a messianic light. And that is a theologically sound way of reading this passage from Jeremiah. It is worth noting, however, the circumstances in which the prophecy was first spoken and heard.

Though it is likely that this particular section of Jeremiah’s prophecy is a later addition (33:14-26 is lacking in the Septuagint), in its current literary context, the promises are spoken to address a dire situation. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, are advancing on Jerusalem. The streets of Jerusalem will soon be filled with the corpses of her people (33:4-5), and the prophet Jeremiah himself is imprisoned by King Zedekiah (33:1). The worst has not yet happened, but it is inevitable. Any reasonable person can see that the city is doomed. Jeremiah’s many prophecies of judgment—prophecies that have landed him in prison—are coming true. Yet now, in the midst of catastrophe, the prophet finally speaks words of promise!

In the previous chapter, he has purchased a piece of land, a foolish thing to do in a country soon to be conquered by invading armies. Nevertheless, he has purchased the land as a pledge, as earnest of God’s redemption: “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land” (32:15). In the midst of impending doom, a sign of hope is enacted.

Similarly, in chapter 33, the prophet speaks of the coming restoration, the restoration of normal, everyday life. There will come a time in the land of Judah when *“there shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride”* (33:10-11). And now, in this passage, Jeremiah speaks of the restoration not simply of daily life (as momentous as that is), but also of one of the chief signs of God’s favour, the restoration of the Davidic line. A righteous Branch will sprout from the line of David. A similar image is found in Isaiah 11:1–*“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”* The image is one of hope and unexpected joy: new life springing up from what looks like a dead stump.

One of the chief tragedies of the Babylonian Exile, of course, was the end of the Davidic dynasty. For nearly four hundred years, descendants of David had occupied the throne of Judah, and God had promised that it would always be so (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89). But the Babylonians destroyed David’s city, burned Solomon’s temple, and took David’s heirs into exile. The promises of God seemed to have come to an end. To a people devastated by loss, Jeremiah’s prophecy offered hope: *“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”* (33:14). All might seem lost, but God still is faithful. The house of David might be cut down, but God is able to bring life out of death. A branch will sprout.

Historically, of course, the Davidic line did not return to the throne, so passages like this (and its parallel, Jeremiah 23:5-6), were in time interpreted to be speaking about the coming ideal ruler, the Messiah. That is certainly the reason this passage is one of the lectionary readings for the first Sunday in Advent. The descendant of David who will *“execute justice and righteousness in the land”* is the one for whom we wait in this Advent season. And his salvation encompasses not just Judah and Jerusalem, but the whole world. Such is the word of promise and hope in this text. However, we should acknowledge, that like Jeremiah, we hear these words in a time when many are experiencing great loss: loss of job, of security, of home. While there are no invading armies on our country’s doorstep, many of us may resonate with the fear and hopelessness of Jeremiah’s original audience.

A righteous Branch will spring up. This is a word of hope, but not naïve hope. Jeremiah is not someone who looks at the world through rose-coloured glasses. Far from it! This is a prophet imprisoned by his own government because he keeps prophesying doom.

A righteous Branch will spring up. Maybe so, but that saving act of God is not readily apparent in Jeremiah’s or Judah’s current situation, dreading the imminent arrival of enemy armies.

A righteous Branch will spring up. This word of tenacious hope is spoken to counteract all of the life-sapping, despair-inducing evidence to the contrary. And that is its power. The same proclamation is given today to us, inheritors of Jeremiah’s task. We are called to speak a word of hope and promise in a world often filled with fear and uncertainty, even despair. Especially in this season of Advent, we speak words of hope. In the midst of darkness, light is about to break in. In the midst of despair, hope erupts. After long waiting, a branch will sprout. The complete fulfilment of God’s promises has not yet happened, but it is coming. Such is Advent faith, and Advent hope.

StF 722 – When mountains that we thought secure

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| 1) When mountains that we thought secure
Lie crumbled where we stand
And pain and helplessness endure
- all from another's hand -
Help us to bear the prophet's mark,
To stand apart from hate
And witness to the Father's call
For justice in the land. | 2) God is our strength and refuge still
Though all the earth give way;
Our help at every time of ill,
The light of our dark day.
And as his people in the world
We bear the scars of grief,
But echo faith's resounding note
- and still for justice pray. |
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3) There is a place of holiness
Where God makes warfare cease.
There is a day of hopefulness,
A promised time of peace.
So, here today, we bear the pain
Of inhumanity,
But pledge our lives to live for truth
So justice may increase.

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Reading: Luke 21: 25-36

‘There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

He told them this parable: ‘Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.’

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.’

Reflection¹

Time after time

Time is not always as straightforward as it seems. From the perspective of us living in the Western Hemisphere, for example, “today” is already “tomorrow” on the other side of the Earth. With anticipation of a joyful event, time might move quite slowly. On the other hand, a dreaded end can arrive far too quickly. There’s never enough time or always too much. Time might feel feather-light or brick-heavy, depending on whether it expands one’s dreams or diminishes one’s hopes. And who didn’t experience the shifting sense of time during the global pandemic?

Jesus in Luke 21 reminds his followers that God is not constrained by the *chronos* time represented by calendar and clock, the sort of time that keeps everything from happening at once. In God’s *kairos* time, past and future are woven together for the sake of today. God’s time is the now/not-yet that reshapes the world’s present expectations—and our own. Shortly before his death, the once-and-always Saviour—called “*a sign*” in his infancy (Luke 2:34)—reveals how to know when the kingdom of God is near: *There will be signs in the sun the moon and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves ... the powers of the heavens will be shaken* (Luke 21:25, 26b). Even during earth-rending moments, God is near.

A present future

Immediately obvious in the passage are the many references to the future. There will be signs (Luke 21:25) causing people to fear what is coming upon the world (verse 26). The powers of the heavens will be shaken and people will see the Son of Humanity coming in a cloud with power and glory (verse 27). All these things will begin to take place (verse 28; see also verse 36); indeed, that day...*will come upon all who live on the face of the earth* (verse 35). *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away* (verse 33).

To whom does this future belong? In the immediate literary-historical context, shortly before his arrest, Jesus speaks to “all the people” (Luke 20:45; 21:38) of a promise to be fulfilled on the other side of devastating events about to unfold. Included in “all the people” are those living a generation or two later, when Luke is written, after the destruction of the Temple (see 21:20-24), as well as we who are alive today. Already we receive God’s promised redemption even as we continue to look ahead to its fulfilment.

Reading the signs

The ability to interpret a future-shaped present depends, in part, on reference to the past. Jesus’ words in Luke 21:25-26 echo Isaiah’s prophecy against Babylon, when God promises to “*make the heavens tremble, and earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger*” (Isaiah 13:13). The Son of Humanity (Son of Man, NRSV) who comes on a cloud with power and glory (Luke 21:27) hearkens back to Daniel’s vision of an apocalyptic figure who appears after God has ended the reign of an exceptionally cruel king (Daniel 7:13-14). Even the parable of “the fig tree and all the trees” suggests that the past can help to make sense of the future. When buds begin to form on barren trees we are confident that winter is ending and summer will arrive. Why? Because we have previously lived through a change of seasons, or because others have told us of their own experience.

A world un-done

Despite the promise of spring, however, new buds do not always form. Sometimes they are killed by drought or swept away by the roaring waves of a hundred-year flood—for the third time in six years. Fires rage through forests and woods, darkening the sun and sending evidence of ash and smoke even thousands of miles away. Hillsides are cleared for the sake of a better view, corporations fell rainforests in order to improve their bottom line, and nations install border-walls that cut through orchards and separate trees from the people who attend to their care. The devastation is enough to take one’s breath away—which is the meaning of the Greek word translated as “faint” in Luke 21:26: *People will faint (apopsychō = to stop breathing, be breathless) from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.* Nonetheless, the apocalyptic vision shared by Jesus is assurance that even (especially) in the face of devastation—whether it is caused by nature’s fury or by human hubris—the reign of God will not be impeded. No matter how much it appears that the world is coming un-done, God’s way endures.

Redemption and apocalyptic hope

The message on this first Sunday of Advent paints a hope-filled picture for “*all who live on the face of the whole earth*” (Luke 21:34). Jesus speaks in the language of apocalyptic, or revelation. Vivid images—the heavens being shaken, the Son of Humanity appearing in the clouds—depend on the metaphors’ capacity to express a community’s trauma while also offering powerful hope in the midst of those experiences. When the present reality includes wars and political tumult (*distress among nations*), climate catastrophe (*signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars*), global pandemic (*breathless from fear and foreboding*), unemployment, hate crimes, racist ideologies, death-dealing illness, displacement by terror, or anything else that traps people in fear or despair (*weighs down hearts*), it is then that we look for the coming of the Son of Humanity, the Christ whose promised future makes all the difference for today. *Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near* (Luke 21:28)

Throughout Advent and Christmas 2024 the Methodist Church is calling us all to “Hush the Noise”. This is a phrase taken from the carol “It came upon the midnight clear” and can be used each week as a basis for worship. The readings for this First Sunday in Advent are challenging us to put aside the hustle and bustle of preparing for the birth of Christ and truly listen to his words. Preparing for the Second Coming of the longed for Messiah, accepting that although the world and its troubles continue to grow, God is aware and close to each one of us. We are called to hush and be still, put aside daily worry and what if, when, how and listen - the words of Christ are for you.

StF 715 – The right hand of God

- 1) The right hand of God is writing in our land,
Writing with power and with love;
Our conflicts and our fears,
Our triumphs and our tears,
Are recorded by the right hand of God.
- 2) The right hand of God is pointing in our land,
Pointing the way we must go;
So clouded is the way,
So easily we stray,
But we're guided by the right hand of God.
- 3) The right hand of God is striking in our land,
Striking out at envy, hate and greed;
Our selfishness and lust,
Our pride and deeds unjust,
Are destroyed by the right hand of God.
- 4) The right hand of God is lifting in our land,
Lifting the fallen one by one;
Each one is known by name,
And lifted now from shame,
By the lifting of the right hand of God.
- 5) The right hand of God is healing in our land,
Healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
So wondrous is its touch,
With love that means so much,
When we're healed by the right hand of God.
- 6) The right hand of God is planting in our land,
Planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
In these many-peopled lands,
Let his children all join hands,
And be one with the right hand of God.

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father, we, your people give you thanks and praise. We thank you that through long years you prepared a people to be your own. We praise you for the patriarchs, the prophets and the law givers who brought your words. We rejoice in the constancy of your love, that rebellion and indifference could not prevent you from loving all. We thank you most of all for the coming of Jesus Christ your Son, in whom your love has reached its climax and goal. We thank you that he is the perfect copy of your nature and so we see in him your likeness. We thank you for his birth and ministry, his death and resurrection, his glorious revelation of your generous love. Heavenly Father you call us to cast off the works of darkness and to walk as children of light: we give ourselves to this work in the confidence that you will strengthen us in time of need. Recreate us in the image of Jesus and renew us by your Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

'Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing'

Father forgive us as we blunder on in ignorance, destroying what is good, polluting the earth, exploiting the Labour of the poor, consuming more than we need, hurting those around us. Open the eyes of the people of the world that we may see and know what we are doing and turn once more to you.

Saviour help us in times of suffering, of illness and pain, of bereavement and sorrow, of anxiety and despair, of guilt and regret. We ask that you are with all who suffer, healing, strengthening and comforting them and giving hope.

God with us, we ask above all for your presence, your love, your peace, your strength and your joy. May our lives and the life of the world be renewed and transformed by trust in your unfailing care, in your love and mercy hear out prayer. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 693 – Beauty for brokenness

- 1) Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset Your kingdom increase.
- 2) Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't
speak.
- Ch) *God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray,
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come change our love from a spark
To a flame*
- 3) Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched
earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain.
- 4) Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
Plundered and poisoned, our future,
our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need.
- 5) Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until Your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of Your ways,
Seek Your salvation and bring You their praise.

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Blessing²

The angels are still singing. Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat their song. And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be ours, now and always. **Amen**

¹ Working Preacher commentaries on Jeremiah 33:14-16 and Luke 21 25-36

² Hush the Noise Resources, The Methodist Church