

**12.01.24 ~ Advent 1 ~ Hope**

**“The Days Are Coming!”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Jeremiah 33:14-16** <sup>NIV</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

<sup>15</sup> “‘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.

<sup>16</sup> 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 Savior.’

**Leader: These Prophetic Words Prepare Us.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Luke 21:25-36** <sup>NLT</sup>

<sup>25</sup> “And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. <sup>26</sup> People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!”

<sup>29</sup> Then he gave them this illustration: “Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. <sup>30</sup> When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

<sup>34</sup> “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. <sup>36</sup> Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

**Leader: These Are Jesus’ Important Words of Instruction.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

All knowing God, we come to you in expectation this Sunday and with thanksgiving for the many blessings we celebrated this week. Thank you for our families and friends and time to reflect. Your generosity and sacrifice are evident in our Lord and Savior, Jesus. As we prepare for his coming to the manger, let us also prepare for his second coming, a time we do not know but can certainly expect. During this Advent season and today’s message of hope, let us draw closer to you in a faith that will

dominate uncertainty. Please speak to us through your messenger and this message. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Thank you, first, to those who came to help Deck the Halls! As we have done in the past, you will see a few items added each week, almost like opening an advent calendar! See if you can spot changes when you come on Sunday. Yesterday, we had a good workday with fellowship and creative spirits. Volunteers, thank you again for your time, energy, and patience.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, a season of the church calendar of waiting and preparation for the Christ child and should also be a personal season of prayer and contemplation. It is a needed balance to the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparation. This first week, as you can read in the Advent insert, we begin with HOPE. Hope is not just “wishful thinking” something you want to happen, or the proverbial shopping list of wants and needs, or hoping you're on Santa's nice list. Biblical hope is based on trusting God and his promises, much like we have been hearing about during the recent stewardship and generosity sermons. We must trust God in all things and circumstances. Trusting God means also a type of surrender to his will; this always makes us uncomfortable. These words remind me that the spiritual life is a collaborative effort between God and me. I must trust him, surrender to him, but also do my part and accept my responsibility.

Jeremiah reminds the exiles that God promised a succession of just and righteous leaders from the House of David. This is one of the Messianic prophecies of Jesus Christ as redeemer and restorer. The “days are coming” referred to both the destruction of Judah and the surrounding

nations, including the temple, but it also referred to a period of blessing and restoration for a freed and united Israel after a long exile from Jerusalem. A “branch” of David would rule over a kingdom united in peace and prosperity. A new covenant would be in place and the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The phrase “the Lord our righteous savior” refers to the divine characteristics that this shoot of Jesse will demonstrate in his ministry. With New Testament minds, we know the shoot of Jesse would be Jesus, descended **from** David. We also see God’s reassurance that He is faithful to his beloved Israel and will create stability and justice through this enduring hope and peace of a coming Messiah.

The Luke passage comes after Jesus’ triumphant entry on the colt into Jerusalem (we call this Palm Sunday) and after more teaching in the temple, upsetting the religious leaders but well before the crucifixion. These are Jesus’ final words before he joins his disciples for a last meal in the upper room and goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to be with them in the presence of his father, and then is betrayed and arrested. It is important that we establish the outcome for Christ before we welcome the infant and recall his purpose. So, he is trying to prepare his disciples for what is to come for them too, not just for himself: more betrayal, destruction of the temple in AD 70, persecution, violent deaths—all a seemingly horrific future! But from his divine and prophetic perspective, there is eternal hope for them, his believers, and the world. Yes, judgment days are coming, but so is salvation.

Isn’t that the Good News of the Advent and Christmas seasons? It’s not just about retail growth, shopping for presents, being with family and friends. It’s not about getting past the difficult fall election polarizations,

incessant bickering, continuing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, or our health issues, the deaths of loved ones, seasonal sadness as the time and daylight hours change, or the remembrances of those no longer with us. Where is the beauty in all of that? Our fall recollections were important life experiences, and we must both respect them, but also know they are temporary. Just this past Thursday, you remembered many of the things you are grateful for in life. Those unique gifts, the people, the places you've travelled to, good health, and things you love to do not only bring you joy, but also bring you an existential beauty every day if we pause long enough to appreciate it.

One exercise some of us use is a gratitude journal, where each night before bed, you note at least three things (or more) that you're grateful for. It becomes a sort of diary and journal of life's many blessings, both past and present. I find that it soothes my sleep and wakes me up in a better mood the next morning! Recalling the beauty of the day rather than unfinished to-do items is a spiritual re-set. Your journal page may start with blank lines, but like the holly bush outside that is just green and prickly to the touch most of the year, with God's provision of water and sunlight suddenly has beautiful orange or red berries for the birds and us to enjoy. Or like this Christmas tree, that started out yesterday just green with unplugged lights on it. With a little effort, today there are shiny ribbons, ornaments, and lights to make it more beautiful! It is not just the bows that give it beauty, but the actions and collaboration of us all working together to create a space more wonderful than any normal Sunday. The family that helps us (like all families) has had seasons of challenge but seeing them all working together so well and members of

our church pairing up to complete certain tasks was a joy to behold—true love and beauty. Even when I picked up special supplies from Merrifield Garden Center, Lee Ann’s former workmate, whose mother is here for cancer treatment, brought us a half bushel of West Virginia apples from her tree. That is the intangible, relational, and natural beauty of hope and love. It was unexpected yet cherished!

Recall that Advent is the start of the new church calendar, and it begins with hope. Our true gift of the season is the Christ child coming and Advent is this expectation. But what is the difference between expectation and expectancy? “‘Expectancy’ refers to a more open, anticipatory state of believing something might happen, while ‘expectation’ implies a more specific and often rigid belief about how something should turn out, potentially leading to disappointment if reality doesn't match up; essentially, expectancy is the act of looking forward to something with an open mind, while expectation can be a set of predetermined conditions that might lead to frustration if not met.” (online: [Google AI Overview tool, 12.1.24](#)) Advent should be more like a season of expectancy, like a pregnant couple expecting a child, being not quite sure who they will turn out to be as a family, or anxious about health and provision. But is a time of great hope, personally, generationally, and even spiritually. Can our Advent season be similar? Not one of human expectation that could let us down, but a season of expectancy (yes, the Christ child is coming!) and a season filled with hope, joy, peace, and love? We must not focus on fear or judgment, but on his love and redemption. May we also remember this Gospel message is historical. Let us rejoice in the coming of the Lord in Advent at his

birth and his eternal return at a time we cannot know. We will never know the day or time that Jesus will return, but we do know that because of our faith in God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are redeemed, and as believers will rejoice in it! Amen? Amen!||

**Let us pray.** Eternal God, we thank you today and every day for your gift of life and its beauty. May we appreciate it more as we live into this season of Advent. Help us to find new beauty with each tradition. In this season of busyness, draw us closer to Jesus, who is at your side. Enlarge our capacity for **hope**, peace, joy, and love as we try to be more generous to others this season. Bless these elements as we remember your sacrifice for our salvation. Keep us expectant with open minds and hearts to receive you. In Jesus' name, and we pray, Amen.