

**First Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2018,**

**Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36**

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the Christian New Year. However our lessons don't bring much cause for celebration, but instead bring images of darkness and doom. In our gospel lesson from Luke we have Jesus telling the people that there will be signs of destruction and turmoil in the heavenly places and among the nations. In our lesson from Jeremiah, the context is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and taking captive their leaders. In our letter from Paul to the church in Thessalonica, the believers there were worried about what would happen to the believers who died before the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, there was natural disaster, societal collapse and personal death. What are people of faith to do?

We too live with signs of imminent natural disaster. The California fires these past two years are signs of climate change. Weather patterns have changed, and we seem to have more floods and more drought. George Gardiner mentioned to me a New York Times Magazine article about the demise of insects, "The Insect Apocalypse is Here." (November 27, 2018) The loss of insects over the past several decades has been noticed anecdotally, but is now being measured. The changes in the environment are affecting the insect population, which may have an enormous impact because they are so much part of the ecosystem which we take for granted. For example the decline in the number of species of bees who are pollinators could have a real impact.

When we contemplate the societal and political changes we are living into, it can make anyone despair, no matter what political perspective one has. Decency, duty and fair play seem to be replaced by vulgarity, and a self-seeking win at all costs approach. The passing of George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41<sup>st</sup> President was noted as a passing of a generation of leaders which emphasized mutual respect and service to the nation. Our political conversation has taken the low road and diminishes our sense of one nation, and instead has divided us into competing tribes.

And each of us may enter times of personal challenge, when we can seem overwhelmed. These challenges can be related to our health, a downturn in our economic fortunes, a break-up of relationships, and ultimately death. No matter who we are we will eventually face dark times.

Is this any way to begin a new Christian Year? We may not think so, but because the world as it is does not reflect the reign of God fully yet, change is necessary for the reign of God to be revealed. The signs of darkness are ever present in life. Environmental change, societal and political degradation, and personal trauma are indeed challenges. But these are our lessons for the First Sunday of Advent, because in the darkness of our lives, God is at work.

Jesus said, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near." Even in the darkness of times, God is at work to bring forth the kingdom, where righteousness, justice and mercy are practiced.

We may feel overwhelmed by the environmental crisis we are living into. And yes, each one of us by ourselves cannot solve the problem facing us. But together, we can each take a step to reduce our carbon footprint. We can educate ourselves about how we can reduce the amount of carbon we put back in the environment. We can make small but significant changes in the way we live: how we generate electricity, how we heat our homes, how we transport ourselves, eating lower on the food chain, and how we dispose our waste. If we make changes in these areas as a society, we can make a

significant reduction collectively. And if we pool our efforts together as the Episcopal Church, we can advocate with our neighbors to make change together. Each one of us can make some change for the sake of the future. And most of us have already made many changes. And when we decide to make these changes it is like a leaf sprouting the kingdom.

The same is true of our political discourse. We can refuse to be partisan in our speaking and seek the common good, doing what we can for the betterment of the whole. We can assume the best of those who disagree with us, and seek to understand a different point of view. We can make it our purpose to serve so that all the people may benefit, instead of seeking self-interest. This may not turn around the decline in social discourse immediately, but each time someone decides not to participate in negativity the world is changing a bit.

Jeremiah spoke of a hope that God will raise up a righteous branch of David who would execute justice and righteousness in the land in the midst of devastation when the unrighteous branch of David was carried off into exile in Babylon. Even in the midst of total defeat, God raised up Jeremiah to remind the people that God still reigns. When we choose to act with righteousness, we become another leaf sprouting the kingdom.

And finally, when our lives are personally challenged by tragedy, illness, violence or natural catastrophe, our prayer will be that we will be able to “put on the armor of light” over our hearts, which is the love of God for us found in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Apostle Paul reminded the believers in Thessalonica to “abound in love for one another, just as we abound in love for you.” We cannot avoid the inevitable personal losses of life, but it is the community of friends that love us in our losses that will sustain us.

Just as Paul reminded the faithful in Thessalonica that although fellow believers may die before the reign of God will be fulfilled in the world, they together living in love could taste a bit of the kingdom. Even though the world may be cruel, the faithful could live in hope and charity for all. This too is the leaf sprouting the kingdom.

And as we live into the Season of Advent, and prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas, we are reminded of how Jesus entered into the world mostly unknown. God was acting through Mary and Joseph, and Jesus’ birth was yet another leaf sprouting the kingdom.

So I wish you a holy New Year! No matter what is happening in the physical world, the societal world and your personal worlds, know that God is working, and the kingdom is coming. Together we can be the leaves sprouting the kingdom to the glory of God.

Amen.

**I propose to show that during times of great darkness, people of faith persevere in their hope in God and God’s promises, and that together we do the little things which are signs of God’s reign sprouting like fig leaves in spring.**

## **The Collect**

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great

humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

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. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

## **The Psalm**

### **Psalm 25:1-9**

*Ad te, Domine, levavi*

- 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;  
my God, I put my trust in you; \*  
let me not be humiliated,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame; \*  
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- 3 Show me your ways, O LORD, \*  
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, \*  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
in you have I trusted all the day long.
- 5 Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, \*  
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; \*  
remember me according to your love  
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the LORD; \*  
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- 8 He guides the humble in doing right \*  
and teaches his way to the lowly.
- 9 All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness \*  
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

## **The New Testament**

### **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

## **The Gospel**

### **Luke 21:25-36**

Jesus said, "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. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

**In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

## **The Collect**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **Old Testament**

### **Baruch 5:1-9**

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem,  
and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.

Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God;  
put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;

for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven.  
For God will give you evermore the name,  
    "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."  
Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height;  
    look toward the east,  
and see your children gathered from west and east  
    at the word of the Holy One,  
    rejoicing that God has remembered them.  
For they went out from you on foot,  
    led away by their enemies;  
but God will bring them back to you,  
    carried in glory, as on a royal throne.  
For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low  
    and the valleys filled up, to make level ground,  
    so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.  
The woods and every fragrant tree  
    have shaded Israel at God's command.  
For God will lead Israel with joy,  
    in the light of his glory,  
    with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

## **The Response**

### **Canticle 16 Page 92, BCP**

#### **The Song of Zechariah   *Benedictus Dominus Deus***

*Luke 1: 68-79*

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; \*  
    he has come to his people and set them free.  
He has raised up for us a mighty savior, \*  
    born of the house of his servant David.  
Through his holy prophets he promised of old,  
that he would save us from our enemies, \*  
    from the hands of all who hate us.  
He promised to show mercy to our fathers \*  
    and to remember his holy covenant.  
This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, \*  
    to set us free from the hands of our enemies,  
Free to worship him without fear, \*  
    holy and righteous in his sight  
    all the days of our life.  
You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, \*  
    for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation \*  
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God \*  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, \*  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: \*  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

## **The New Testament**

### **Philippians 1:3-11**

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

## **The Gospel**

### **Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

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