

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Advent 1
Jeremiah 23:5-6
November 27th, 2016

Ah, Advent. The beginning of the Church-Year is here again. Thanksgiving is behind us and Christmas is ahead of us. Trees and decorations will be on display in our living spaces and in our sanctuary soon. And now, the mindset of giving and receiving is upon us as we are the cusp of making our way into December and the Christmas season.

One Lutheran theologian called this time of year, “be kind to God, Season.” Be kind to Him and come to church for midweek Advent Services, for Christmas Eve Services. Be kind to God by being kind to others – giving gifts more than receiving them. Be kind to God and give thanks. Give thanks because this is the season to do so. This is the season to sing of Him. This is the season we want to be kind to God by saying Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays (and we will get upset at others when they don’t say Merry Christmas... because this is be kind to God season).

So okay, be kind to God... Yes, I suppose He deserves it. Or does He? More than I should be kind to God is that He should be kind to me – right? For many this has been a bad year – sickness, stress, fear and trepidation, along with change and whatever else... It would be nice if God would be kind to us. “God, get me out of this mess,” we might say in our prayers. “God, pull this heavy load off my heart for just one day.” “God, why are you waiting so long to share your relief for what is breaking my heart – what is causing me fear and my grief today.” Be kind to God? Hey God, let’s make this, “You be kind to me,” Season instead.

There are all sorts of life situations that make us cry out to God wondering if He is even paying attention to our lives. These are the situations that affect us right now. These are “lived in at the present moment” difficulties. Today, there may be something pressing on your heart, making you worry to a greater degree than in times past, or putting fear in each of your days. Today is the time we live in. Today is hard. Today is the time to worry about tomorrow. And so, when the prophet Jeremiah talks about something that happened in the past – like the Lord raising up a righteous branch from the line of David, we tend not to think of that as much comfort. That’s something that “happened.” I want something that will happen – to help me – to get me through. What will that be?

But Jeremiah is speaking for us... not only to point to what was raised up... the righteous branch of David – Jesus born in Bethlehem to take away our sins. But also, to point to a hope and a future for those who struggle with the burden of life right now. Jeremiah is not only pointing to something that already has happened. He is pointing out for us what will happen – even for us 2016 Christians.

Advent is a misunderstood season. Most of the time we think of it as preparation for the coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. No. Advent is about the coming of Jesus on the last day. Jesus has come already for us. He lived and He died for us already. There is no anticipation for the birth of Jesus. Pastor Froiland and Sara are anticipating the birth of their daughter sometime during this month of December. They are looking forward to that joy. But, for me, I’m not anticipating the joy of the birth of my two sons. No one is doing that. That has already happen. People don’t come up to me and say, “Are you looking forward to Jacob’s birth?” No, because that has already happened.

Yet, we do celebrate birthday anniversaries. We do look back at the birth of our family and friends and we rejoice. But we aren't happy because it will be their last one. No, we are happy because we look forward to celebrating with them again – same time next year. For us today, think of Advent as a celebration of what is to come for us – not so much of what has already happened. Yes, what Jesus did – what has happened – was important... dying on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. But what is yet to come is worth celebrating even more. The reason, His work and promise will be made complete. You have fully inherited eternal life through the gift of what Jeremiah calls, “The Lord is our righteousness.” That is fantastic news.

And so, with what has been given and what WILL be seen in completion, this is truly “God is kind to us” season. God is kind to sinners who are blessed beyond compare... even when hardship seems to reign in this fallen world. God is kind to sinners as He continues to provide underserved and abundant gifts in the midst of a decaying world. God is kind... always abounding in steadfast love... even when we can't wrap our minds around the “why” of our sufferings.

“The Lord is our righteousness,” it says in Jeremiah 23:6. In Christ we are righteous. It's true. We don't deserve it, but that's just how much He loves us. He is our righteousness and we have the Lord because first and foremost, the Lord has us. So, just don't be kind to God this season. Be kind in every season. A season for kindness does not mean that for the rest of the year, it's up to us whether or not to be kind. Though, I know how we get. We get concerned that if we don't watch out for ourselves first, then who will. We have heard it said that it's a dog eat dog world out there and it's true. But turn not against your neighbor in need. Live to be righteousness for others. In other words, let others see Christ in you.

You see, Advent is a preparation season. We prepare for the coming of our Lord – not at Christmas so much as the last day. God comes – for the sake of being with us – to bless us. God comes to us to have a relationship with us. And to be in relationship means to be close to us. How much closer could God be than as a child in a manger? How much closer could God be than to leave with us a promise that He doesn't just come that once, but continues to come to us and will come again. We continue to meet in this community together. We share in His gifts together. He brings people together to live in His family of true believers.

This past Thursday, many people gathered as God intended communities called families and ate turkey, stuffing and all the trimmings. It's not a mistake, beloved in the Lord, that God made families... to talk to one another, to share, support, and lean on one another. It's no mistake that God made an intentional community right here in Platte Woods, gathered around food – the Lord's Supper given for your forgiveness. Communities get involved for the sake of one another. They support and care for one another. This is how God builds up the individual – through community. He doesn't make us to be lone rangers. We need each other. That's why we have one another.

It's be kind to God season. Of course that should be every season no matter what. He is kind to us. Even in trouble, God is kind. He's kind because He is THE KIND of God who gives everything for us to be with Him. So God bless you, as He surely promises, as we move into another church-year together. In Christ's family – in His name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.