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Saturday, December 1, 2012
Modified: Sunday, December 2, 2018
Year C, Advent 1

Jeremiah 33:14-16
Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36

“Worth the wait”

- When I think about Advent, I think about is *waiting*
 - And the thought of waiting brings up several situations:
 - Like waiting to board a plane
 - Waiting in line to check out, especially in the month of December
 - Waiting for the dentist
 - But if I were to think back of all the times I’ve waited somewhat impatiently, number 1 would have to be Disney World
 - I believe I was still in high school,
 - It was my mother’s dream vacation for us- she had always wanted to go, she had been saving up
 - So we fly down to Florida, first time on an airplane, rent a tiny, purple Geo Metro car- you know, the subcompact model
 - And head to the amusement parks
 - Besides the giant turkey leg my dad bought from one of the food vendors
 - My main memory of this trip... was of waiting in lines
 - It wasn’t the rides, or the castle, or the food- it was standing in what seemed like a hot, endless line for the rides
 - Waiting is not always a pleasant experience, even if it is waiting for something exciting like a Disney ride
 - Well today starts our liturgical wait: it is the first Sunday of Advent
 - This is the day my hither-to-fore bitterness about all the early Christmas decoration and music turns to joy
 - We begin a conscience wait, a holy wait, in anticipation of Christmas
 - There are a lot of different types of waiting: dreadful waiting, excited anticipation, and even the waiting for the unknown
 - All seem to find their way into our Advent season
 - Advent is not a simple season: just like there are different types of waiting,

- Advent is layered with meanings, each existing simultaneously
- It is past, future, and present
- One aspect to this season is found in our Old Testament reading this morning from the book of Jeremiah, from the past
- It is a message of hope: that even though things are really bad right now, God will bring a better future
- This portion of the book was written around 587 BCE, just as Jerusalem is on the brink of disaster¹
- The Babylonians will overtake Jerusalem soon, and all hope seems to be lost
- Jeremiah had been arrested for speaking out saying God had brought this as a punishment for Israel
- And from what we know, he was in prison as he composed this letter
- It was the people's faith which was being tested here, as they believed that God would not allow anyone to conquer them
- Not only is this a difficult time for the Israelites, but the entire known world is experiencing a huge shift in power
- The Babylonians are fighting the Assyrians, the equivalent of an ancient world war
- And they are winning- overtaking the Assyrian empire which has ruled the Ancient world for nearly 200 years ²
- With all the instability and all the upheaval, even when Jeremiah knows Jerusalem will fall and be reduced to a wasteland
- The prophet speaks a message of hope
- God speaks through him and he writes that the days are coming when God will fulfill the promises made to God's people
- And a righteous branch will spring forth from David to execute justice and righteousness
- And everyone will live in safety
- That is a bold hope in the midst of what seems hopeless
- Yet somehow Jeremiah was able to see through the impending destruction to God's salvation
- Yet in the midst of all of this and more, Jeremiah believes so much in the hope that God promises, that he purchases a piece of land

¹ *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Marion Soards, ed., Year C Advent 1, 19-20

² *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Marion Soards, ed., Year C Advent 1, 19-20

- It is in a town that has already fallen to the Babylonians ³
- It seems a waste of money, but to Jeremiah, he is ready to wait on God to work out God's salvation
- It will not happen very quickly- in fact, we still are waiting for God's peace to come in this area of the world
- Even now there is violence and the threat of more of it in this area of the world and beyond it
- We too wait with the both the people of the ancient world and our current one for a time when God will bring about justice and righteousness
- In fact, it is what Jesus talks about in the Gospel reading this morning
 - We wait for the end... the very end
 - Advent wants us to wait and look forward to the Second Coming of Christ
 - One where this redeeming work Jeremiah looks forward to will be completed, and the rift between us and God restored
 - And we do not like to think much about this one, because as Jesus tells us, Judgment comes at the end with Jesus's second Advent
 - Jesus says to not get distracted with frivolous things, or drunkenness, or even the worries of this life
 - Don't numb and sit it out
 - Instead, we are to actively wait for this day
 - While judgment is not always a pleasant thought, this waiting does not have to be a dreadful one
 - Brian McLaren argues in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, that without this judgment, there can be no grace ⁴
 - And that grace of God, as Jeremiah anticipates will be there through the destruction of his world
 - The grace that was made flesh the first time 2000 years ago
 - And the grace that comes to us each year and will be there at the end of the world.
 - That grace is finally why Advent is a time of hope.
- Advent is waiting for God to bring about these promises in a radically new and different way
 - In Advent, we are specifically waiting for the Christ-child to be born

³ *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Marion Soards, ed., Year C Advent 1, 23

⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 93 of 297, from the Kindle Edition

- Part of this involves imagining the world before Christ with Jeremiah, and walking with Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem
- Hearing the angels sing, seeing the star, and witnessing the Wise Men bring their gifts
- But the big part is that we celebrate and remember when God radically changes strategies and enters creation in the flesh
- Beginning the transformational process for which Jeremiah is so desperately waiting
- And yet it is not simply an event in the past- Jesus does not only appear in a manger
- We also wait in the present for God to come in our lives too, in the now.
- Here is what makes Advent so very important for us: it is the act of waiting- holy and intentional waiting- on the edge of our seat waiting
- For Jesus to come today.
- Because just like during Jeremiah's life time, the anxiety and fear that permeates society all around us can make us blind to him
- We get caught up in the rush, in the traffic jams, the financial burdens, and even the family get togethers
- We can get so busy that we shift to autopilot and miss him completely
- But that does not have to happen: Advent gives us another option
- There is something about intentionally slowing down, waiting, and daring to hope that makes it easier to see Christ
- To see him in the faces of those whom we usually pass by without seeing
- Those in search for a meal, a home, or to lay their head safely
- Those we love and long to see, and also those with whom we do not get along
- We pray, we wait for Jesus to come again right now, in the present, because we need him so desperately-
 - The world needs him desperately
- We need to be reminded once again of how to love, and wait, and hope
- If waiting is what we are to do this season, waiting on many different levels
 - It's the past with Jeremiah, and with Mary and Joseph
 - It is waiting for the future and the Coming again of Christ
 - And it's in the now, in our lives and in the lives of all of God's children
 - What are we to do while we wait?

- I don't mean as a distraction, because it is clear we should be vigilant as we look for appearances of Christ
- What are we to do?
- Paul gives us a hint in his letter and in our last reading for the day
- He too is waiting, in this case for an opportunity to visit the church in Thessalonika
- And he asks the Lord to make them increase and abound in love for one another and for all
- And he prays that God will strengthen their hearts in holiness
- Our prayer should be the same.
- Increasing in love while we wait for Christ
- If we commit to this intentional and holy wait, I do think we can find the Christ child once again
- If we are watchful, we can catch a glimpse of the work God is doing all around us, and maybe even join in
- We can wait in hope, even as the world seems to unravel, knowing that God's grace and presence will still be there.
- Unlike so many other times we have to wait for something in our lives, I think this one will be worth it.

Amen.