

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, November 29, 2015

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."

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."

Let us pray....Amen.

Advent. The Season of Advent is about new beginnings. Well, more accurately, the Season of Advent is about anticipating new beginnings. The Christian Church sets aside the 4 Sundays before Christmas to whet our appetites for the celebration of the Messiah's birth.

In ancient times, even up until the 19th century, this time leading up to Christmas was a time of prayer, of fasting, of deep contemplation. Often thought of as a 'mini-Lent', the faithful would deny themselves luxuries and concentrate on the meaning of the birth of Jesus.

In the Northern Hemisphere, Advent takes place in some of the darkest days of the year, with Christmas arriving just days from the Winter Solstice, the darkest day of the year. The arrival of the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child coincides with the beginning of the lengthening days, a rebirth so to speak.

Worship during the Advent Season was marked by hymns and songs that were written in a minor key, and were subdued and contemplative. This Season is meant to help us build our excitement for Christmas, so that

when we sing Joy to the World the Lord is come, we are literally joyful for the world.

Today, we celebrate the first Sunday in Advent with a new beginning in our faith family: the baptism of Lily Elaine Maute. I can't think of a more appropriate way of starting the new faith year than with the sacrament of baptism! Promises from Lily's parents, promises from the supportive congregation, and the promise of Lily's own faith life, her own faith journey, beginning right here.

Baptism is an act of hope, and it just happens that we are in the first Sunday of Advent, where we light the candle of Hope!

Lighting the first candle of Advent, bringing a new soul into the church so she might learn of Christ, these are important ways to help us prepare for the coming of the Christ Child.

Lily's baptism isn't the final word in her faith life, however. In our tradition, she will take responsibility for her own promises at her confirmation. There, she will be seen as an adult in the eyes of the church, able to support, and be supported by a faith community.

And today's Advent lighting isn't the final word in our Christmas preparation, either. We have more weeks to come in which to contemplate the Peace, Love, and Joy that Christ brings along with his leadership.

So, just as we don't expect Lily to honor the promises made by her parents and this congregation until she is ready to take them on, we don't expect to celebrate the birth of Christ this early in the Season. That's why we don't sing Christmas Carols this early, that's why we don't decorate the whole sanctuary all at once, that's why we aren't wishing each other a merry Christmas this morning....that time will come, just not today.

This week is a week of Hope. Maybe not in the world, with violence and hatred spinning out of control, but it can be in here, and in our own hearts. A week of remembering the Hope that Christ brings to the world can find its way out into the world, if we let it.

In the week to come, before we light another Advent Candle, and before we baptize another baby, let's spend some time contemplating the Hope we wish to see in the world. Let's spend some time thinking about how we can be the Hope we wish to see in the world.

And then we will be ready to light the next candle, the candle of Peace. We can't expect others to carry the light of Hope for us, we'll have to do that ourselves. Amen.