

1C Advent 28 November 2021

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

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

There may not be much to add to what the children just talked about, perhaps to wish everyone “Happy New Year” as we begin the new Church year. Once again we start through the stories that make up the church year – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter...

On this first day of the liturgical year, we start with a peek ahead and a reality check. The prophet Jeremiah tells the Jews living in exile, feeling as dead as an old tree stump, that God will raise up a leader who will bring new life with justice and restoration, who will be honest and fair. Then Saint Luke gives a poetic description of just how bad things can get to remind us that yes, the world may be in an awful state, but God is going to intervene.

Hope is the key. Bad things may happen around us. Bad things happen to most of us during our lifetimes. Sometimes it may seem like bad leaders, bad people, and bad plans always win. But God promises us that in the end they will not win.

God's love will win. We have God's promise and we can trust in that. It may be hard at times to remember this, but it is always true.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face is fear. Not war or community unrest, not economic inequity or prejudice, but fear. When we hear today's gospel reading, we may make an

unwelcome comparison between the events Luke describes and recent terrorist attacks, or environmental concerns, wars abroad, political unrest at home.

And this fear may ring true down through the ages, all the way back to Biblical times; why else is the most common command and promise in Scripture “Do not fear?”

Now, Saint Luke doesn’t offer us a timeframe and seems vague about when Jesus will return. He just says that as the budding fig leaves herald the advent of summer, so will the signs of the coming kingdom be clear to the Christian community. And in our reading Jesus urges his followers not to get caught up in the excessive pleasures or worries of the day, but to watch confidently for the Lord’s return, whenever it may come.

Luke’s emphasis on how we shall live in the meantime, waiting for events that Jesus says are signs of our redemptions, comes because we live our lives between two poles of God’s intervention in the world: the coming of Christ in the flesh to triumph over death, and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time in triumph over all the powers of earth and heaven.

We live in the “in-between” time, which can be tense and even scary for us. It is also a time characterized by hope and courage, because we know that the end of the story has already

been written by the resurrected Christ. Jesus' promises create for his followers the ability to be faithful, to do their duty, to retain vision and compassion and empathy.

We are not helpless amid the trauma and tumult of our age. And while we await Jesus' complete redemption, we have good work to do in the meantime. We are his disciples in the world, offering compassion to those who are hurting, forgiveness to those who've wronged us, encouragement to those who are afraid, solidarity with those who are oppressed, and acceptance of all God's people.

Our various good acts may seem like very small gestures. But in light of Jesus' promise, we remember that there are no small gestures, only actions done in love and courage.

Jesus reminds us he is the Lord of history. Because he will bring all things to a good end we can live standing together in the in-between time, showing all people the love of God we have known in Jesus Christ, in communities of hope, courage and confidence.

Christ's light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. If or when we grow afraid, we can bid each other again and again to stand up and raise our heads, confident that our redemption draws near, in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom together with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, now and forever.
Amen.