

Sermon for Sunday 1 December 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

First Sunday of Advent

Scriptures: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalter: 756 (*Response 2*) Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Sermon

Waiting.

The first four Sundays of the Christian year do that.

Then, whenever we really do wait, we've already had some training.

Training in being hopeful.

The first lesson today talks about the Babylonian captivity, when Israel was conquered by that huge neighboring kingdom of Babylon, and all the leaders of Israel captured and taken far away for seventy years, while those left among the ruins did what they could to survive among the ruins. Jeremiah the prophet had predicted this, and his words before, during, and after are one way the Jews thought about it before it happened, then lived through it, then survived and remembered forever after they returned ... which not all of them did. Like Jews throughout the centuries, some scattered and settled far from Israel.

Today's psalm talks about all sides of that: Help me wait. Forgive me for deserving it. If it wasn't my fault, help me get over it anyway. You're all I've got, Lord.

Then, 1 Thessalonians, which is probably the first letter Paul wrote ever to a church, shows him writing back a few months after he'd started this little church, saying encouraging things, giving good advice ... but also we think we can hear him hoping they're getting along and doing right, like he taught them and they promised, now that it's down to the other side of beginning, and waiting is the rest of their lives ... which a lot of people, including Paul, thought would be the end of the story, Jesus coming back and the end of the world happening. That's how Christianity started. Believing it wouldn't be long, and then learning to wait.

Last, the Gospel, is from the Book of Luke, which will be our main Jesus-book all this new Christian year. We use almost the last words of Luke's gospel today, with Jesus talking about the end-time. Waiting that's totally unpredictable. Waiting of the kind we read of every day in Gaza: How much longer can this last? Who's going to be left? It's past scary and awful. Should I even watch out? Jesus says, Yes, you'd better be alert so you can survive.

We're always waiting. That's what God does too: loving in new ways, in my life, in creation; and not just doing new things, but dealing with what happens when you love. You change; you learn; you start, and then you start again.

So today we say, Come along. Suffer, and rejoice with the Spirit in all its tenderness, learning teaching different insights because that is the story without end.

Jesus said eternal life is now. God is love. We never stop learning that, discovering it, hearing about it in fresh examples and from different witnesses. And part of learning that is waiting, being surprised, settling in and then finding out some more.

Advent is new this year. Always is. Get ready, Wait. When you think you've learned how, find out how some more. God comes. You didn't know God could turn that around. You can still learn. Change is the only constant. Love is the way.

Amen.