

*Three Advents, One People*

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Advent C-1, 11-28-2021

1. Children: What are you thankful for?
2. The first Sunday in Advent is always a bit jarring. On the one hand, Thanksgiving was just three days ago. All of sudden, here we are in Advent. On another level, some of us have been shopping this week. Out there Christmas is already in full swing, and has been for some time, with music and everything.
3. But here in the church, we realize, that Advent is not Christmas. Advent is a kind of a countdown, but Christmas itself won't be here until December 25. Mary and Joseph are not in the stable. The shepherds are still in the fields. Mary is still pregnant.
4. In the church, before we jump into Christmas, we set the stage. We get ready. The scriptures we read are a far cry from the warm cozy feeling of the animals, the shepherds and the baby. They are strange and –jarring.
5. This morning, to add to the strangeness, I'll be speaking of three advents, not just one. The first advent comes from Jeremiah's prophecy of a green branch growing out of the dead stump. You see it on the cover of your bulletin, a devastated landscape, burned, cut over.
6. <https://signoftherose.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/rootofjessebranch.jpg>

7. This is Jeremiah's world. This was his country. A foreign army had conquered their cities and dragged them away from their homes into exile in a foreign land. It's all very depressing. But Jeremiah sees the future--"the days are surely coming". The image that he is working with is that of a stump that has been cut down. That's the story of their country. For most trees, and countries this would be the end of the story. The tree is dead. The country is gone. But Jeremiah sees something no one else can see. He sees a new shoot, a new branch, that will appear sometime in the future. Jesus became that new shoot that grew out of the dead stump hundreds of years later.
8. This is the advent we celebrate on Christmas. Life comes to a dead and barren land, Jesus bursts into the world like the month of May. God in the flesh. He taught us and showed us the ways of God. Even though the world killed him, God lifted him from the grave, and gave us new life through faith in Him. Jesus the Messiah, changed the world, and continues to change the world, one person at a time.
9. That's one advent. But there's another advent in view in today's readings.
10. A second advent is found in our gospel reading, yet another strange and jarring scripture. This is Jesus, telling us to get ready for the coming of the Son of Man, as he describes himself. He says there will be *signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations, nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves*. Kind of sounds like climate change—hurricanes, extreme weather. *People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world*. That's a pretty good description of what's going on today. But

we also know that people throughout history have seen their own times in these words.

11. Get ready, the Son of Man will come in the clouds with power and glory. Prepare yourself, because a day of salvation for some is a day of judgement for others. Jesus describes an apocalyptic, end of the world scenario.
12. This is another advent, we call it the second coming of Christ. During this season of Advent, it gives us another way to think about what it's like to live in a world B.C., before Christ.
13. It's easy to see that parts of the messianic vision have come to pass, but others lie still in the future. The prophets envisioned peace on earth, good will toward men. We still need a messiah, just as like the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah. They envisioned a future world of justice, righteousness and peace, a peaceable kingdom where lion and lamb lie down together. There's a huge distance between the prophetic dream and the world we live in.
14. We do not yet have peace on earth, bombs have not yet been melted down into farm equipment. Millions go hungry and die of starvation and disease. There is fear and foreboding on the earth. We are especially reminded this week, with the discovery of a new strain of Covid, the Omicron. The stock market has a very bad day, there is much pointing of fingers, and our future once again is put into question by a pandemic.
15. And so, we long for Christ to come and fix all that is wrong with the world. This is advent #2, our longing for the Christ to come again and complete what he started.

16. But there's a third advent. That's the advent in our Psalm. It's an advent of any time and place. The Psalmist lives in a time before Jesus, but has advent longings nonetheless.
17. *To you O Lord I lift up my soul; make me to know your ways. Lead me in your truth; teach me.* This is present tense. This is not hundreds of years from now. This is now. *Lord, come to me.*
18. The poet prays for forgiveness for the sins of his youth. He or she did some bad things which they now regret. Forgiveness is looked for and needed now. There's marvelous immediacy to this. *I'm waiting all the day long.* God is going to come and do these things.
19. We celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> coming 2000 years ago. But Jesus is not only a great teacher and philosopher from way back when. He is also our teacher right now, today, if we wait for him. Christ comes to each of us in all kinds of ways.
20. This third advent is more of a present reality, something that happens now, if we pay attention.
21. It just so happens I have a quote from Pastor Patrick Heery. Two years ago, he said "*We do not know when it will happen but at some point, Christ will appear in our lives this Advent. He will speak to us in a word of Scripture, or in a song, or in a person we meet.*"
22. "*And the question is whether we will be listening, paying attention, or whether we will miss it. Will our name be spoken, and we won't hear it? Will our hope be answered, and we won't notice? Will life itself happen, and we'll miss it? Will we be too busy, too caught up in our own worries or pleasures, too distracted, too numb, too skeptical or angry?*"

23. To be honest, most of the time, I am in that category of being too busy, too caught up in worries or pleasures to notice.
24. More and more, I believe there are sacred moments happening all the time. It's up to us to see them. I'm pretty blind most of the time, but I catch glimpses. Living alone helps. I watch my dog, full of joy, running full tilt after a squirrel, leaping over logs in the woods.
25. I wake up after a good night's sleep, feel the air in my lungs. As Ginny stretches, I also stretch, feel the blood in my bones.
26. These days, I am especially appreciative of in-person contact, live music, face to face genuine connection with people. That's sacred. It doesn't happen every time, but often enough.
27. I marvel at being alive. Life itself is sacred. I don't take it for granted anymore, because well, some people are not alive.
28. There are everyday sacred advents, and there are larger advents as well. When Annette died, the outpouring of love, the funeral, the committal, her death itself—all was sacred. God was close.
29. Advent is not just a season of the year. It's who we are, a people of Advent. We are a people who are looking up, waiting and watching. We see God's dream of a better world and do what we can to bring it in, bit by bit.
30. We dare to pray *thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. When others throw their hands up in despair, we dare to envision a world of peace, a world of justice, a world where our darkness is swallowed up in the light of God's Kingdom. We dare to envision, and by God's grace, to see the advent of Christ. Even so, come Lord Jesus.