

Good Sunday morning, from a lightly snow covered hill in Rockport!

“The days are surely coming...” is my sermon title this morning. With all the dissension around the world and in our country, my guess is those few words could be spoken by ALL of us, each of us in our own particular understanding of how the days ought to be coming. Speaking of the Bible, the story of our sacred heritage.... it was just the same back then, too. Those in power and high places wanted more power and higher places. Those with no power and no place at all wanted something, anything, of safety, compassion, justice. We haven’t come very far, have we? The “haves” want more, the “have nots” want something, anything.... But we have to keep trying, don’t we?

I’m thinking this morning about “recalculating.” You know, that’s what the nice lady in my navigation app says when I’m driving and I’ve made a wrong turn, according to my nice lady map director speaking to me out of my dashboard. ”Recalculating....” And I’m instructed, not to turn around and start over, but to take another route to my destination.

Do we need to do some “recalculating” about how to get to our destination? And just what IS our destination, anyway? Some days I’m not sure at all what our destination is.... How about you? Some days all I can do is pray Jeremiah’s mantra over and over.... “The days are surely coming....” when all have enough to eat, when everyone has a place to lay their head at night, when the good will from enough of us overtakes and smothers the deadly ill will from the few with power who only want everything for themselves.... Say it with me.... “The days are surely coming,” and then, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Ps 23:6)

Blessings to each one this cold morn..... I hope to see many of you in church this morning, the first Sunday of Advent! Susan

“The days are surely coming...”

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16 & Luke 21:25-36

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.”
Jeremiah 33:14-16

“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 [Jesus] 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 does not 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.”

Luke 21:25-36

Will you pray with me. Justice seeking, hope fulfilling, comfort giving God, show us the way to wait patiently, if not willingly, in these days of Advent darkening. Be with us in our world-wide, national, community and personal trials, reminding us always “the days are surely coming...” Amen.

It’s the first Sunday of Advent. And the prophet Jeremiah has come to invite us to enter into the season.... in words from a part of the book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament to Christians, that is called “the little book of consolation.”

“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.” (Jeremiah 33:14-16)

Surely consolation is something needed as much now as it ever was in Jeremiah’s time, even though our challenges and struggles are different in many ways from those of people living six hundred years or so before the birth of Jesus. Twenty six hundred years ago people needed reassurance that things were going to get better, that a new, more just, more prosperous time would be awaiting them.

One of the commentators of the book of Jeremiah writes, “The prophetic book of Jeremiah sears the soul, challenges the conscience, and promises hope to the wounded in body and spirit. Its principal subject is survival.”^[1]

“The days are surely coming,” Jeremiah consoles the people of Judah and Israel. “The days are surely coming,” Jeremiah consoles us, if, indeed, we are listening and willing to remain hopeful in spite of many things – discord and distrust, despair and disgust, dire warnings of possible death and difficult days of repairing broken hearts and aging bodies. “The days are surely coming, says the Lord...” (Jer 33:14) To me, those are among the most comforting words in the Bible, “The days are surely coming...”

Words of hope... and hope is the theme for this first Sunday of Advent. You know I’m going to ask you this: what is hope? (get responses) Instead of going to my trusty computer thesaurus for some definitions of hope, I went to my Hebrew and Greek dictionaries. It’s interesting to me that only one word is used for “hope” in Greek in the Bible. The verb is *el-PID-zo*, meaning “to expect or confide.” The noun is *el-PIECE*, meaning “anticipating, usually with pleasure, or expectation, confidence, faith.”^[2]

In Hebrew there are at least four words used for “hope.” *Mik-VEH* means “abiding, something waited for, gathering together.” *Yaw-CHAL* means “to wait, be patient, to trust.” *Shaw-BAR* means “to expect with patience, to scrutinize.” And the Hebrew word for hope that speaks to me the clearest is *tik-VAW*, which means “a cord, or thing that I long for.” It comes from the verb *kaw-VAW*, which means “to bind together.”^[3]

I don’t know about you, but I find it’s hard for me to “hope” by myself. It is of far greater comfort to me to know that others are bound together with me into a cord of hope that is stronger than any hope I can hold all by myself. Binding together makes us stronger. Unwinding ourselves so we are simply single strands waving wildly in any storm does not give me much comfort. My hope lies in being bound – bound to all of you, bound to family and friends, bound to God.

It seems to me this was the hope the prophet Jeremiah was trying to explain to the war torn, damaged, distressed and destroyed peoples he was trying to pastor in his day. Hope comes in being bound together so we can be stronger than any one of us can be in our solitary struggles.

“The days are surely coming...” when all will be well and justice will prevail and people’s lives will be rich and full – perhaps not as well as they used to be, but as they are meant to be in *God’s* time, not our time. I hurt for people I know and love who do not have a belief in *God’s* time.

I want to jump to our reading from the Gospel of Luke this morning. For in this reading, too, Jesus first speaks of all the terrible and terrifying events that will

take place in the land, but then, for those who are alert and on guard, for those who keep up their strength, they will escape all these things and “stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36) For those who have hope, all will be well.

It is easy for these words of Jeremiah and of Jesus to sound very foreign and unrelated to our times. The language is not ours. The visions they portray are unfamiliar. The consequences of human misbehavior they declare, and the rewards of moral and religious fidelity they proclaim sound very strange to us.

What IS “a righteous branch of David,” as Jeremiah announces? What DOES “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” look like, as Jesus proclaims? Can these words carry any meaning for us today? Is there hope for us, too, in their pronouncement?

I wonder if part of our distance from the words of Jeremiah and Jesus is that we don’t wait very well in this country. I know I don’t wait very well. Waiting for deferred gratification is not one of my strong suits! When I want a situation to be different, I want it to be different right now, not later!

Yet, often when I talk with individuals who are going through difficult times, either because of illness or other misfortunes, I can often say no more than, “Only time will make it better. Sometimes there’s just no other way to heal.”

Waiting is difficult. We want it all. I certainly want it all – good health, good relationships, good riches – right now, not later, right now. I wonder if people hearing Jeremiah’s and Jesus’ words were any different. We are an impatient people, then and now.

OUR challenge, I believe, is learning how to bring the prophet’s and Jesus’ announcements into our time and space. Perhaps we can take a stab at it by thinking about the idea of restoration – not exactly like the restoration of a house, but perhaps that’s not such a bad analogy.

When a house is restored, it is brought back to its original, or at least an earlier rendition, only in better condition. If we think of the restoration of this church, it could mean the recovery and repair of this front corner of the church, and the repair of the foundation on the other side of the church.

Restoration is a good thing. It brings back the old life, only better. It brings back the memories of days gone by, reviewed and renewed for a new time for new memories to be made. But restoration doesn’t happen in a day, or even overnight. It takes time. It takes effort. It takes thought. It takes work. It takes constructive, hopeful waiting.

I have a visual aid. I've had this poster since the late 1970's. It hung on my office wall where I was the Executive Director of a crisis intervention center in Oxford, Ohio. I took it with me when I left that position and had kept it on my den wall until you all called me to be your pastor. It hangs in the pastor's office here now. "Things take time." I think that's one of the hardest lessons for us fast moving, instant e-mail and Facebook messaging, 21st century Americans to learn. "Things take time."

Jeremiah taught of restoration over time. So did Jesus.... Restoration to a time when people from different nations could live in safety, and justice would be available to all.... Restoration to a time when God's righteousness would rule, not humans hungry for power and revenge and domination over others.

It must have seemed an impossible task to Jeremiah and to Jesus to have to preach about these things. It seems impossible now, considering the state of the world, our country, and even our midcoast communities, where the daily news of confrontations, disagreements and poor communication abound.

But at the beginning of Advent we are called to think about these things HOPEFULLY because that is what our scripture readings call us to do. Think hopefully, pray hopefully, live hopefully, wait hopefully.

I read a quote awhile back that goes like this – "We always attract into our lives whatever we think about most, believe in most strongly, expect on the deepest level, and imagine most vividly."^[4]

I will challenge you to think about these questions in the next four weeks. Don't worry, I have them written down for you, along with the Advent readings for each week.

What do you *think* about most? Is it the individual events and stresses of each day, or it is the greater sweep of life in which we each play a part?

What do you *believe in* most strongly? Is it that you can overcome most anything on your own if you just try hard enough, or is it that you know God surrounds you each day with support and courage to help you get through anything?

What do you *expect* on the deepest level? Is it that the world will continue to be in a sorry state of angry upheaval forever, or is it that some day, some how, with God's help, all *will* be well?

What do you *imagine* most vividly? Is it a time in which wars are won by the strongest and the weakest are left behind, or is it a time when active respect for all peoples, no matter their religious beliefs, or social customs or political preferences trump the power of deadly weapons and hateful speech?

I hope you will want to think seriously about these questions in coming weeks. I know I will. Remember this, if nothing else about this sermon – “things take time.” “The days are surely coming” when God’s promises will be fulfilled. (Jeremiah 33:14)

Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, November 28, 2021 – First Sunday in Advent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Janet Dwelley

Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.
An asterisk () indicates where you are invited to stand.*
***Bold print** indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.*

GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude Star of the East -- Amanda Kennedy, arr by Roger Wilson

Call to Worship

Pastor: We come to place our hope in God as we pray in confidence.

People: We come to bring hope to those who wander and wonder if there is a God.

All: We come to remind one another there is always hope for the possibility of a brighter future for our world. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” 196 Blue Hymnal

Lighting of the first candle in Advent for hope....

A Responsive Reading “A Year Begins Today” (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 21:25-36

***Gloria Patri No. 70 Glory Be to the Father....**

Message “The days are surely coming...” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” 216 Blue Hymnal

RESPONDING IN FAITH

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord’s Prayer.....

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Offertory Wake, Awake, For Night is Flying -- chorale harmonized by J. S. Bach

***Doxology No. 95 Blue Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow....**

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” 211 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Fantasy on "In Dulci Jubilo" by Gilbert Martin, using a 15th century Latin melody

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, December 5, 2021

Second Sunday in Advent

Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

“The season of Advent is puzzling to many Christians.

The stories read during this season are, by and large, not childhood favorites....

*The stories of Advent are dug from the harsh soil of human struggle
and the littered landscape of dashed dreams.”*

✠ Gary W. Charles, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 4

Prayer List -- Hold in your prayers all those affected by the corona virus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... And all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members.... And all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far..... And add a prayer for Frances Hernandez, recovering from brain surgery, Tammy Whirty, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Kristin Parker O'Neal, Jo Ann Parker's daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams' family, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi's Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and continued deep prayers for Lucy as Hank has come to the end of his cancer journey, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter, and for Sally Harjula's family, since her death last month.....

Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email freerangepastor@gmail.com to add or drop the names from the prayer list AND to let her know if you would like for her to stop by for a visit sometime. She's always glad to have a chat with you!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Monday-11/29/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting
- Thursday-12/2/21.....10:00 – 2:00 pm: Quilters
- Sunday-12/5/21.....9:30 am: Communion Service – 2nd Sunday of Advent
- Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Jello

The flowers this week are given in Honor of Pastor Susan and all my wonderful Church family by Muriel Pinkham.

Reminders for next Sunday, 12/5/21

Deacon for December: Dave Billheimer and Doug Schroeder

Greeter/Usher: Kay Sylvester

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Jackie

Harjula

FI

owers: Arlene

Woodman

Collection Total for Sunday, November 21, 2021:

Pledges - \$324.00

Loose - \$144.00

Total - \$468.00

The 2021 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

Federated Church of Thomaston

**United Church of Christ
&
United Methodist Church
Together Since 1929**

Sunday, November 28, 2021

8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105

FCT email is thomfedchurch@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003, p. 1051.

^[2]*The Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*,” p. 27, in *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990. First published in 1890.

^[3]*The Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, various pages, in *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990. First published in 1890.

^[4]Shakti Gawain in *Reflections in the Light* quoted in *Awaken, The Art of Imaginative Preaching*, for Advent-Epiphany 2006-2007, Year C, p. 7.