

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church
November 29, 2012

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

The First Sunday of Advent

“WAITING”

GOOD THINGS COME FOR THOSE WHO WAIT.

I wonder about that. No doubt, some good things are missed by those who wait.

Missed, because I failed to trust, and take some action.

Missed, because I was seeking a more certain investment. A guaranteed payback. A more sensible return.

Good things missed, because I became drowsy/less alert/my mind set on other things so opportunity passed me by.

ADVENT IS A SEASON FOR WAITING.

-- Four weeks of WAITING. And may I assure you that good things will come.

I tell you. Waiting is not in my nature. Session members will be able to tell you something about that.

**But Advent – I alert you now – Advent is a time for waiting.
Four weeks to practice **WAITING**.**

Jeremiah, the Prophet, spoke to people who were **WAITING.
They were Frustrated – Heartsick – Depressed.**

They were waiting in a desperate time.

**They were in exile in Babylon
Far from Home**

Their temple back in Jerusalem was destroyed.

All the stuff they held dear (all the stuff they couldn't

carry on their backs and in their arms) was lost.
They had been conquered and then sent off into exile by people who did not honor the Lord God –

Who did not respect what they respected –
Who **mocked** their heritage – Their beliefs and customs.

And most disturbing and humiliating of all --
MANY OF THEIR OLD FRIENDS – SOME KINFOLK --
people who had lived next door – SOME WITH WHOM THEY
SHARED HOUSING

-- WERE COMPROMISING THEIR BELIEFS –

and adopting the beliefs and practices of their Babylonian captors.

They argued, “When in Babylon, do what the Babylonians are doing”

In those dismal WAITING days, a pious Jewish poet wrote –

“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept
when we remembered our homeland -- Zion.

“For there our captors required of us songs, --
They taunted us, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

**“BUT HOW SHALL WE SING THE LORD’S SONG IN A
FOREIGN LAND?!”**

**Indeed, how shall we sing any song when everything is crashing-in
around us?**

-- our values uprooted -- our temple laid waste?

... When our way of life is being obliterated?

TO THOSE HEARTSICK, LONELY, CONFUSED PEOPLE
JEREMIAH ANNOUNCES,

“The time is coming when the Lord will fulfill the promise
made with us –

To cause a righteous branch to spring forth –
 And that righteous branch shall execute justice in
 the land – Judah shall be saved –

WE SHALL LIVE SECURE! (JEREMIAH 33:15)

Let's pause now and look more closely.

For **WHAT** are we waiting in ADVENT?

Those words of Jeremiah that Rosi read contain a hint –

WE WAIT FOR GOD TO FULFILL GOD'S PROMISE –
 "TO CAUSE A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH TO
 SPRING FORTH."

Now that's picture language and the Hebrew people were good at
 communicating in pictures – and we are going to lose something in
 translation.

**WE WAIT -- FOR GOD TO TAKE A NEW INITIATIVE!
 FOR GOD – TO DO A NEW THING!**

A NEW THING THAT IS **CONSISTENT** WITH GOD'S LOVE...
 AND THAT EXTENDS GOD'S LOVE – RIGHT INTO OUR
 LIFE.

Directly into our heart!

**LOOK ...WE MAY BE LIVING IN BLEAK AND TROUBLED
 TIMES.**

NO – WE DON'T LIVE IN EXILE IN BABYLON –

BUT TOO OFTEN IT
 FEELS LIKE WE ARE FAR FROM HOME –
 AS A MATTER OF FACT – **YOU MAY BE FAR FROM
 HOME.**

HOME IS ONLY A DREAM – OR PERCHANCE, A MEMORY –

PERHAPS A **BAD** DREAM? A **BITTER** MEMORY???

- **YOU ARE FAR FROM HOME** – when a family member or dear friend is out of touch. Separated by anger and resentment. You just can't get through to her.
- **YOU ARE FAR FROM HOME** – when your investments are depleted and bills pile-up and anxiety builds ... and Christmas is fast approaching.
- **YOU ARE FAR FROM HOME** – when you have too much house and you're less able to manage it all. Yes, you may have the money but not the energy and you are overwhelmed by it all.
- **YOU ARE FAR FROM HOME** – when a loved one – family member or a dear friend – is desperately ill (**OR YOU YOURSELF HAVE RECEIVED A FRIGHTENING DIAGNOSIS**) -- -- and a cure seems beyond reach. And discouraging days turn into futile months.
- **FAR FROM HOME -- AS TERRORISTS -- AND THE THREAT OF TERRORISM UNSETTLES YOUR LIFE -- AND THE LIVES OF THOSE YOU LOVE.** And unnerve our nation. Our world.

FAR FROM HOME – Certainly these are troubled – FEAR-FILLED times, **YOU FEEL POWERLESS AND ALONE.** But as you wait, hear Jeremiah, speak **God's** word --

“GOD IS ALIVE.

“GOD IS AT WORK IN YOUR DESPERATE SITUATION!

Life-bringing nourishment pulses through the stem –

Look -- SEE -- The stem is sprouting –

ALIVE! Extending the life and power and beauty of the branch **directly through your heart and out into your life!**

So there – WITHIN YOUR LIFE – AND FURTHER, WITHIN THIS CHURCH ... WITHIN YOUR FAMILY – God establishes JUSTICE...FAIRNESS... WHOLENESS...HEALTH.

**FOR WHAT DO WE WAIT? – FOR GOD TO ACT –
AND TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE --
AND TO ASSURE GROWTH.**

AND THAT IS WORTH WAITING FOR!!!

AND HOW ARE WE TO WAIT?

The verses I read from Luke’s Gospel give some hints –

“There will be strange things happening, Luke warns –
People will be afraid

so afraid they will faint from fear –

scared to death, so to speak -

but when dire things are happening –

STAND UP!

RAISE YOUR HEADS!

FOR YOUR SALVATION IS NEAR!!!”

**WHEN CONFUSION AND DISAPPOINTMENT TAUNTS YOU --
STAND UP.**

RAISE YOUR HEADS.

FOR YOUR SALVATION IS NEAR!!!

It’s like the psalmist who sang – “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil –

FOR GOD -- The Good Shepherd -- IS WITH ME.”

STAND UP.

RAISE YOUR HEADS.

FOR YOUR SALVATION IS NEAR!!!

Hope is born out of despair – Because of a **presence** – call it **God** --

Jesus – call it Love – my trusted friend. My mentor. My faith filled family.

That's the experience of Paul, follower of Jesus, who suffered chronic pain, yet who exclaimed, "God's grace is sufficient for me."

STAND UP.

RAISE YOUR HEADS.

FOR YOUR SALVATION IS NEAR!!!

Hope is set free – after a long night of despair.

That's the reality expressed by a cancer-stricken patient who confesses,
"Through the darkness, I see the dawn!"

There is no easy way for us to disentangle ourselves from what is wrong around us –

And within us.

But, God's **salvation** staggers to its feet at the very moment the world is at its worst ...

---the very moment you are at your lowest.

And that salvation -- that deliverance

can be recognized and received **especially** by those who have lived **through** despair.

And in that painful living know where help lies –
where hope lies --

AND SO WILL TRUST.

"Good shepherd, you are with me ...

I know, with you, I can struggle through anything!

WE CAN DO IT!

Daughter – Mom – Friend -- Teacher -- you are with me ... we shall prevail!

GOOD Counselor – you stand with me.

After the Darkness comes DAWN.

In this season of WAITING let us intensify the spirit of the Child of Christmas – the one for whom we wait –

and also who is among us to show us the way.

Wise -- spirited Isaiah saw it this way --

“EVEN YOUTHS SHALL FAINT AND BE WEARY –YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN (and even those older and more mature and established)

SHALL FALL EXHAUSTED –

--BUT THOSE WHO WAIT FOR THE LORD SHALL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH.

THEY WILL MOUNT-UP WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES.

THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BE WEARY.

THEY WILL RUN, AND NOT FAINT.

WAIT, I SAY, ON THE LORD. WAIT.