

Sermon for Advent 1A
Sunday, November 27, 2022
“Hope in the midst of uncertainty”

Text: Matthew 24:36-44; Isaiah 2:1-5

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first thing I'd like to say to you this morning is Happy New Year! The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the church's liturgical year. In our three-year lectionary cycle, today begins Year A; in the two-year daily office cycle, today begins Year One. It is a day of new beginnings. The Church lives in cycles: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and the Season after Pentecost (or Ordinary Time), and we mark each season within the cycle with different colors. Cycles are natural; cycles form every aspect of our lives. The calendar is a cycle, repeating and resetting every January with the constancy of the four seasons, as the earth orbits around the sun. Our living bodies run on cycles: sleep-wake cycles, called Circadian rhythms, cell cycles, citric acid cycles. Cycles provide regularity, structure, and certainty. But, we all know that in the midst of all these cycles that occur whether we want them to or not, life is *not* regular, or structured, or certain. Things happen in our lives that upset and disrupt our connections to the cycles. I'd even go so far as to say that day-to-day life often feels disconnected to any sense of regularity, structure, or certainty. The lessons for today deal with the fact that we live in the midst of such disruptions and are given to us in the scriptures to provide hope in the midst of uncertainty.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus knew that his disciples' lives were full of uncertainty, living under Roman rule. They faced constant hardships, disease, and death, being without the benefits of modern technologies that we enjoy in the modern-day. He told his disciples to be on their guard for some unexpected hour in the future when the Son of Man, the Son of Humanity, would return. He told them about the days of Noah, when people were carousing and having a good time, when all of a sudden the Great Flood came and swept them all away. And he brought his message into their present reality with two hypothetical examples: two men in a field, one who will be taken away, and the other who will be left; or, two women grinding grains, one who will be taken away and the other who will be left. He painted a picture for them that seemed scary, unfair, unsettled, and lonely, but he prefaced it by telling him that only God knows the unexpected hour when he will make everything right.

You see, only God knows what is to come, but while we are trudging through day-to-day life we are given a message of hope. Jesus says to wait on God to act. Wait on God to make it right. The Prophet Isaiah offered that same hope when he wrote: “For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” We can't know when all of this will take place, but we must know that it *will* take place. That is our hope in the midst of uncertainty. We live with the changes and chances of life, good or

bad, but just as we can depend on the sun rising each day, just as we can depend on one year progressing to the next, just as we can live with the cycles in our lives, God is unchanging, always faithful, and always providing for us, leading us, guiding us, and comforting us.

We live in times that defy expectation. We live in times when things happen unexpectedly. We still live in times when the things and people we depended on yesterday are no longer there tomorrow. Advent puts things into perspective for us and reminds us that we live in a world and a universe of uncertainty. But if we put on the armor of light that St. Paul wrote about (and is repeated in today's collect) God's great power made known to us by the light of Christ will sustain us. It will sustain us until he comes again.

The Gospel passage is what we call an *apocalyptic* passage. It conveys a message of the last days, the end times. Apocalyptic stories of the Bible often scare us, because they evoke images of doom, destruction, and people suddenly being sucked up into the great beyond. But, apocalyptic messages are really meant to give us hope. Hope is the theme of the First Sunday of Advent. Hope that in the midst of all the uncertainties of life—and uncertainty will always be present—there is a silver lining to every cloud. The message of what is to come gives us hope that however bad the situation seems, God is there to walk the difficult journey with us and he will make everything all right. The message of what is to come offers us hope that even in the face of death, that the souls of the righteous remain in the hand of God.

The message of Jesus for us to be ready for the unexpected hour means that we should keep ourselves ready to face whatever uncertainties befall us; if we're ready for the unexpected hour of his second coming now, then we will be ready for the real challenges we face in our lives today. We need not fear. Jesus knew about uncertainty and adversity during his time here on earth. He was constantly being challenged by the authorities, he saw pain and suffering, and he even tasted death. But gave us hope by leaving us with an example of how God's ultimate power sustains us nevertheless; Jesus enlightened his adversaries, he healed the sick, raised the dead, and rose after being crucified. Jesus' birth would lead to the monumental thing that he did on the Cross and his resurrection. That should always renew our hope in the midst of uncertainty—however long it takes for him to come back. Amen.

Resources

Arland J. Hultgren, "Commentary on Matthew 24:36-44" in *The Working Preacher*, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1912

Ron Allen, "Commentary on Matthew 24:36-44" in *The Working Preacher*, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3089

Stanley Saunders, "Commentary on Matthew 24:36-44" in *The Working Preacher*, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-matthew-2436-44-6>.