

A baptismal meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Advent I, November 29, 2009, dedicated to Temperance Lynn Morgan and Mala Katherine Ghose on their baptismal day, and always to the glory of God!

“ . . . Come Soon ”

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

Part I of V in the sermon series “In a Time Such As This . . . ”

Today begins the season of Advent and our walk toward Bethlehem and the manger and the babe in arms. It is a walk of faith. It is a walk of anticipation and expectation. Let us begin our approach.

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Be on guard!” Jesus tells his disciples in the last week of his life inside the temple in Jerusalem. It’s the eve of his trial before Pilate, when Jesus shares this advice: “Be alert at all times.” Every one of us wonders why Jesus’ voice is the first one we hear on the way to the manger to herald *his* birth. Our season of waiting begins, not in the wilderness with Isaiah’s cry, or with John the Baptist heralding the coming of Christ down by the riverside. Rather, it begins with Jesus. Why do we hear Jesus first?

First, Jesus knew a thing or two about “anxious” waiting.

Whether waiting for the nails to be driven through his hands or waiting for the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus knew that waiting could feel very lonely, long and painful at times. He waited for God, his “Abba,” to answer prayers. He waited for his disciples to figure out how and when they would really follow him. He waited for the children when they came to him and for the hurting and hopeful ones making their way to his healing hands. Jesus knew how to wait.

Second, in Luke 21:25-36, we learn about another side of Jesus’ “anxious” anticipation. Jesus is warning people that they must be ready for the apocalypse. They must be ready for no less than the passing away of heaven and earth and all that we know as existence. In our end is our beginning. This is a real revelation, which is the true root of word “apocalypse.” In other words, Jesus is warning folks to have faith in God and actually see the world around them and appreciate the ones God has placed before their eyes.

“Pay attention,” he is saying. “Don’t lose your edge by constantly drinking, partying and shopping! Wake up from your drunken haze. It has gotten so bad, you have lost track of the seasons of the year. You don’t even know when the leaves of the fig tree are changing from winter to spring! You don’t even know the gifts God has placed right before your eyes. Your senses are so dull you wouldn’t know it if it hit you in the head. Wake up!”

To read Luke 21:25-36 seems out of sorts with the image we have of Jesus. It almost feels like he is shouting at us. What happened to gentle Jesus, healing Jesus, sweet Jesus, and for that matter baby Jesus? It’s like the school crossing guard who quietly guides the children day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out, one day standing at the corner, waving her arms and flags screaming at kids and cars: “STOP TEXTING AND TALKING ON YOUR PHONE! LOOK AROUND YOU! LISTEN TO EACH OTHER! PAY ATTENTION!”

When someone does this, we usually call them crazy. Perhaps we should call them prophets of God. Perhaps we should say they

woke us up just in time to see the multitudes of gifts God has placed right before our eyes. Since “apocalypse” simply means “revelation,” I would like you to wake up and take a look at your life today. What moments have you been missing? What gifts have been right in front of your eyes that you have been too dulled by anger or judgment or laziness to see?

Look at your life and really see it for the first time. Perhaps it is the sun coming through the trees in your back yard. Perhaps the deep sorrow and sadness in your parent’s eyes, your children’s eyes, or your neighbor’s eyes have escaped you.

Or perhaps you are so good at looking right in front of you that you miss the bigger picture. Perhaps you don’t see the beauty or the pain all around you because of your focus on one thing right in front of you. Perhaps you can’t dream dreams or see visions because you only ever look at the bottom line.

Whatever your case, pay attention to the revelations of God appearing in 3-D and technicolor every day all around you – which is no less than the kingdom of God.

Enter Jeremiah the prophet. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote of this prophet:

“Jeremiah’s soul was in pain, stern with gloom. To his wistful eye, the city’s walls seemed to reel. The days that were to come would be dreadful. He called, he urged his people to repent - and he failed. He screamed, wept, moaned - and was left with terror in his soul. (A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets, I*, Harper Collins, 1962, p. 105).

Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet and the prophet of wrath for a reason. For 50 years, he called the people to repent and turn from ways of wickedness. In the end, he brought them a sprig of hope.

If we are not accustomed to hearing Jesus shout about the end

of time, we are also not conditioned to having the “prophet of wrath” proclaim hope. Granted, it is only a tiny branch springing up from the tree of righteousness. But this sprig of hope is significant because the one who is coming from King David’s line will bring justice and righteousness to the people. He will rule the people with fairness, equity and honesty. He will set things right.

Breaking into the ordinary days of late November comes a word of hope. “The days are surely coming, says the Lord.” This is the advent of God – after all, Advent means “coming.” Every one of us should put down our cell phones and ipods, and iphones and headphones, our channel changers and email blasters and listen for the strains and not-so-distant sounds of a season waiting to be born. “Wake up!” Jesus screams from the Temple Mount! See the shoot of Jesse springing forth from freezing winter ground!

In the UCC, we call ourselves the “God is Speaking” church. For this season, we might want to adjust our motto to fit the call of Christ in this season of anticipation.

May our theme for Advent be, “God is still kicking!” Can we feel the feet of God pressing against the belly of Mary and kicking in this still waiting season? May it be “God is still screaming.” Can we hear the good news in apocalyptic language? Can we wake up and embrace the blessings right before our eyes before it’s too late? May it be “God is still bringing justice and righteousness.” Can we join forces and see that God’s will is done for those yearning to be free?

In a time such as this, come soon, Lord God. Please come soon.
Amen.