

Time to Go Home

HOPE

November 28, 2021

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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."

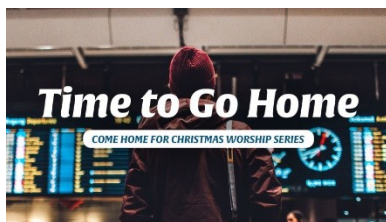
Luke 21:29-36

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

³⁴ "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, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ 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."

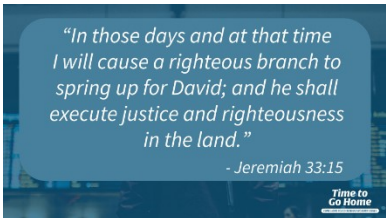


As we begin our Advent worship series, "Come Home for Christmas", we begin in Luke 21. The season of Advent is one that calls us back to the church, back to the roots of our faith, as we draw nearer and nearer to the incarnation of Jesus Christ on Christmas Eve. Advent calls us home to the kingdom of God, to the place we long for. The kingdom of God is the place where family gathers, where peace resides, where justice abides, where hope will rise. Advent also calls us to look forward to something greater, to something more that is just on the horizon. We also long for this coming kingdom – a place where war will be no more, where all people will walk in the light of Christ, where joy will abound, and where love will be the tie that binds and holds all things together. As we prepare for this time together today, let us begin with a word of prayer...



Today's message is "Time to Go Home." This is something we all do from time to time during the holidays or during other occasions during the year. There are two sides to this concept. Sometimes we are the ones who go back home. What do we do when we prepare to go home? We make lists. We get things in order. We plan our trip, gas up the car, maybe we buy snacks. Sometimes we are the place people come back home to. What do we do to receive people into our homes? We clean and maybe ready a room or two for guests. We stock up the fridge. We plan our menus. We try and be our hospitable best for those who come back home.

Today we lit the candle of hope. Some traditions name this day the "Sunday of Hope." It is with hope that we prepare to head home. Some traditions call this first candle the "prophecy candle". It is fitting that we begin in the Word of God with the prophet Jeremiah. I invite you to turn with me to Jeremiah 33. Jeremiah was a prophet during the period when the Assyrians and then the Babylonians ruled over Israel. Many Israelites had been carried off into exile and the people were rapidly losing hope. Jeremiah speaks a word of hope to those living in a time of darkness. In verse fourteen God promises to fulfill the covenant made years before with King David. Speaking of a time to come, God speaks through Jeremiah, saying, *"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 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."*

- Jeremiah 33:15

Time to
Go Home

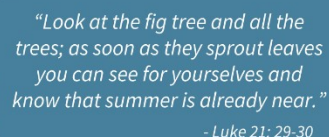
Reading through our New Testament lens we see and understand this verse as one that foretells the coming of Christ. As these words brought hope to the people of Jeremiah's day, so too do these words bring hope to us today as we begin the season of Advent.

There is also an unspoken call to be ready or prepared in these words from God. *"In those days..."* and *"at that time"* implies that God is waiting for something. The people will not come home from exile until God's timing is right. Jesus, the righteous branch, will not enter the world until God's timing is right.

Our passage from Luke 21 also speaks of timing. Please turn with me to Luke 21 as we begin to look at our gospel reading. At first thought, perhaps this is an interesting place to begin our Advent journey. This passage comes towards the end of Jesus' ministry, not at the beginning. He has just foretold the destruction of the temple, where not one stone will be left upon another.

This is followed by a warning – of famines and earthquakes, of war and rumors of war, of false prophets that will try and lead many astray. As we pick up this reading today we turn to the “Lesson of the Fig Tree.” As I just said, at first glance maybe it is an odd place to begin our Advent journey. Maybe you were expecting a visit from an angel or a song from Mary. Yet this passage is one that speaks of hope.

In verses 29 and 30 Jesus instructs, *"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."

- Luke 21: 29-30

Jesus is calling us to look for signs of growth, for signs of life. There is always a sense of expectancy about the season of Christmas. We are accustomed to looking for signs that the day is drawing closer. Advent calendars count down the days for some of us. Certain movies come on, signaling that the season is upon us. The lights get put up, the tree gets decorated, the stockings are hung, the cards get sent out and begin to fill our mailboxes and our inboxes.

If you have children at home, they wait anxiously for the first present to appear under the tree. But if you were like us, you hid away all the presents and as December rolled in, the kids began to search for our hiding places. Discovering the stash of wrapped boxes, the shaking and holding would begin. There would maybe even be the prying up a piece or two of tape, trying to reveal what is inside. As we think about a child's unhindered longing for the promise of Christmas, we should be reminded that we too wait for the promise of Christ – that branch of David, that shoot of life on the tree – the babe born in that manger in tiny Bethlehem.

Leading into this verse Jesus tells his disciples to *"stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* It is natural to duck or to run for cover when wars and famines and earthquakes come. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples to look for signs of hope. That was the word of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah too. Look up in faith, trust in God, have confidence in God's timing and in God's plan. In the same way Advent calls us to pay attention, to watch for God's signs, to head towards home.

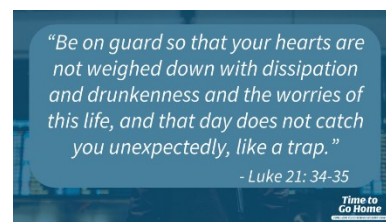


In our adult world, this can be tricky in this time of the year. It is still November, so how can Advent be starting already? That means Christmas is just around the corner. There is so much to get done, so much to prepare for. There are places to go and events to attend. If we are not intentional about our Advent journey, we will miss that it is time to go home. If not intentional, we will look up and find ourselves sitting here on Christmas Eve, wondering what happened to much of December.

Our Advent journey primarily calls us to the prophecies and to the miraculous birth, to the angels and the shepherds, to the gift that God gave in the manger in Bethlehem. Yes, this is one focus in Advent. We look back and we celebrate the peace on earth that comes in the Christ child. We look back and we praise God for the intentional choice to come and dwell among us, to be like us, to learn what it is like to be human. In our passage from Luke, Jesus also calls us to look ahead, to the kingdom of God that is drawing near. We are called to look ahead to the day when war will be no more, to the day when the lion lays down with the lamb.

The birth of Christ set in motion the plan to one day make all things new. Advent is a looking forward to this day as well as a looking back to the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus also calls us to look around.

Jesus calls us to look around, to be on guard, to be alert at all times. Just like Christmas Eve can sneak up on us, so too can the pleasures and worries of this world. In verses 34 and 35 we read, *"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."* Jesus



invites us to be on guard against spending too much time enjoying the physical pleasures of this world. The holiday celebrations, the office parties, the festive gatherings with family - they can certainly weigh us down physically. That's a good word for the holiday season, isn't it? 😊

Jesus also encourages us to be on guard against allowing the worries of this life – so that they will not weigh us down emotionally. The holidays are a prime time to wonder if we gave the right gifts or enough gifts. They are a time when we can question if we have done enough. Taken together these things can sneak upon us *"unexpectedly, like a trap."* We have all breathed a huge sigh of relief on the afternoon of December 25th or perhaps as we awaken on January 1st. Jesus warns us that the temptations on this world and the worries of this life *"will come upon all who live on the face of the earth"* and that we should pray to have the *"strength to escape all these things that will take place."*

These things can also cause us to miss those moments when God suddenly becomes present during this season. We can miss the whispers of God calling us to come home, to find our place in the presence of the holy and sacred. If our hearts are heavy with the concerns and the worries of the world, if our souls are weighed down by the sins we carry, we can miss the glimpses of the kingdom of God. We can miss the gasps of wonder that come when one unexpectedly feels the love of God being poured out in their lives. We can miss the special moment that accompanies the gift that was given after much thought and consideration. We can move on to tearing open the next one, missing the expectant look of a child or a spouse that has waited and waited to see us open that gift that they so carefully made or considered or saved and saved to buy for us.



In many ways we are called to slow down, to look around, to be present in the moment to God and to those we love. We are called to savor the love of God that is realized in the birth of Jesus Christ. We are invited to slow down and to be present, to pay attention to God in the everyday, in the ordinary. Instead of simply passing so much by, Jesus invites us to slow down, to notice the new growth, to see the signs of life, the signs of faith. The Christ invites us to gaze upon the ordinary, to spend time in those moments that are expressions of God's love for us or are expressions of our love for one another. Be present in the moments of laughter and in the moments of sadness that also come upon us during the holiday season. Be present in the giving and in the receiving of gifts – be they presents wrapped in bright paper, be they kind words and soft smiles, be they gentle hugs given by friends, family, or even by strangers.

Be present in the songs of angelic choirs and in the ordinary of the manger, that place where a simple child lay, kicking softly in that bed of hay, covered in dirt and cow's hair, swaddled in blankets. Advent is a call to be ready, to make ready, to go home. As we begin this holy season of Advent, may we seek God in all moments, in all people, and especially in our very own hearts. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. During the season of Advent, how do you hope to see your relationship with God deepen? What steps can help that happen?
- 2) *Pray*. As you consider being present to God in both the holy and in the ordinary, how can your prayer practices during Advent facilitate this movement towards an increased awareness of God's presence?
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 25:4-10. How does knowing God's ways and living humbly and faithfully help us to pay attention and be present to others waiting for the kingdom of God?