

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Luke 21:25-36
29 Nov. 09

“Happy New Year”

Happy new year! I'm not rushing things. This first Sunday in Advent begins a new year in the life of the Church, the people of God.

Though, to be honest, you know something strange is afoot when you you're wished a Happy New Year on Nov. 29. When that happens, you know somebody's calendar, somebody's timing is a bit off.

As long as I can remember, I've pictured the year as kind of an oval. In my oval, Jan. is over here in the lower right quadrant. Here's February and March. And up here at the apex of the oval is April. Good month that. My birthday's in April, and baseball season starts. What more could you want? And so it goes on around the oval until you get to here, which is where we are now, in November.

That's a circular view of time. Time goes around and around, repeating and repeating. And so it is. We put the beach stuff away in the beach box, knowing that when we get to here in the oval, we'll get it out again. Later today, I'll drag myself up to the attic and pull out the Advent wreath and lights. And a couple weeks later, all the Christmas stuff. And when we get to January, we'll put it all away. We won't even consider throwing it out, because we know that circle will come around again because times and seasons are circular.

Unless you're a Christian. If you're a Christian, you know that there is a circular nature to times and seasons, but you also know that there is forward thrust to time, that a new day and a new creation is coming. God acts in history to change history. There will be a future in God's time when God's promises will be

fulfilled. Because our world is broken, we long for those days and yearn for that time.

This season of Advent is attuned to that yearning. We mark time differently. Our new year begins today. December, for us, is not a countdown to Christmas, but a count up, a counting forward to God's new day which the birth of Christ ushers in. So no New Year's resolutions today. Instead, a remembering, a celebrating, and a leaning into God's promises, past, present, and future, because God acts in history to change history.

Sometimes it is really hard to believe that God acts in history to change history. There's an abundance of evidence to show that things are not the way God says they are to be. And if we were to ask why God just doesn't step in and fix things, we would not be the first to ask such a question.

I wonder why Jeremiah doesn't ask just this question. Jeremiah did not have a happy life. He didn't really want to be God's prophet, and he complained bitterly about what his job was doing to him. That and the fact that nobody listened to him. All of Jeremiah's cajoling and warnings seemed to him to be just so much wasted wind.

And now when Jeremiah writes the words we heard a bit ago? Now things are worse than ever. As we light our first Advent candle, Jeremiah knows that his city, Jerusalem, is about to be set ablaze. The invading army is coming, and the streets of Jerusalem will soon be filled with the corpses of her people. Yet in the midst of catastrophe Jeremiah, this prophet of gloom and doom which no one wanted to listen to finally speaks words of hope and promise. “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land.” In the time of greatest distress, Jeremiah remembers God's faithfulness and finds sure and certain hope for the future. In

God's time, God will act in history to change history.

It has ever thus been so. When things seem dire, says Jesus, know that God is at work. When you see worrisome signs, stand up, raise your heads, and know that your redemption is drawing near.

Later in this season we will hear Mary's song about a God who has done great things for her, who casts down the mighty and lifts up the lowly, and who fills the hungry with good things. This song she sings despite her own laughable circumstances. Even in her unmarried, pregnant state she knew that God acts in history to change history. From Moses to Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, history is full of those who, because they have been to the mountaintop and peered into the promised land, knew that God acts in history to change history. Having heard the words of God's promised future, they found the challenges of the present not only endurable, but hopeful.

We, too, with our own personal challenges, setbacks, and disappointments, can see that God is mixing things up, acting in history, acting in God's good time. We, too, can stand up and raise our heads, because our redemption is drawing near.