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Advent 1 Year C – Trinity – 2018

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Advent 1 Year C – Trinity – 2018

Tanya Ramer¹

Texts: Jeremiah 33:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-14, Luke 21:25-36

In the Peanuts comic strip, Linus and Lucy are standing at the window looking out at the rain falling. Lucy says to Linus, "Boy, look at it rain . . . What if it floods the earth?" Linus, the resident biblical scholar for the Peanuts, answers, "It will never do that . . . in the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow." With a smile on her face, Lucy replies, "Linus, you've taken a great load off my mind." To which Linus responds, "Sound theology has a way of doing that."²

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the time in the church year where everyone begins to think about Christmas, many want to slow the days to prepare for it, others want to rush toward it, but when Advent hits, most people are thinking about its larger sibling, Christmas – and the list of items that need to be crossed off before the big day.

This smaller sibling to Christmas, that we call Advent is a season about waiting: waiting for the birth of the Christ child, waiting for God's peace to break through in the world, waiting for the Kingdom of God to show itself in this time and this place . . . waiting . . . waiting that requires some patience.

As Christians gather in churches throughout the world this morning, they are coming expecting to hear a message of hope and peace. I'm guessing they did not come thinking they would be hearing another gospel text that talks about ends days and being on guard – **even if** the text **does** have tones that are relevant to the events that are happening in the world. Most Christians want to gather in church this morning for a word of peace and hope, and perhaps what they will receive instead is a bit of sound theology for today's text and today's world.

For the last several weeks, our gospel readings have been about preparing for end times, watching for signs, being alert, and rumours of war. And throughout the gospels, when the disciples are questioning Jesus about these teachings, I wonder if the question they are asking isn't **misdirected**. They want to know **when** these things will take place so that they can be ready, and **what** will the signs be that they can look for?

But what if the question isn't **when** all this will happen? "The reality is this: anything can happen at any moment – and in one way or another everything *is* happening in every moment. There is no present moment to which one can cling, and change is not limited to predictability and control."³ And maybe the question doesn't begin with a **what** either.

Maybe the question we can ponder is the **how!** **How** shall we live in the meantime of waiting? In many a Lutheran churches, the topic of salvation is always near our lips. And

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² Charles Schultz, Peanuts, adapted by David E. Leininger.

³ Bartlett, David Lyon. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 1 Year C, Volume 1*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 24.

for many in the church salvation is one of those theological things that will happen when we die and are resurrected with Christ for all eternity . . . and what if that understanding of salvation were not a **when** question but a **how** question for us right now? How is salvation already unfolding in this time and place? How will we know that it is unfolding, how will it be realized? And instead of waiting for the feast of eternal life, and treating the life we live now as the appetizer, how might we treat the life we live right now as the main course, or the feast?

For far too long, the church has been obsessed with what comes in the afterlife, and working our way through this life in order to enter the kingdom of God at the end of our earthly life. How might that understanding be understood if we could see that the kingdom of God is already here? Would that impact **how** we live in this life time, that God has given to each of us? The church and faith is full of paradoxes: here and not yet, appetizer and feast, life eternal now and later.

Even our readings for today, all of them, are a bit paradoxical. Even though the gospel feels a bit doomy and gloomy, hear again words of hope found in Jeremiah, "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up from David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land (33:15). When this text was recorded, the people knew what it was like to live in uncertainty and gloomy times, and even then God promised God's hope to the people, God's justice and righteousness for the world. The when is really God's to worry about, the how is ours to reflect upon and participate in with others. And for biblical history buffs, we know that the Branch to spring up from David, was Jesus himself.

Our reading from 1 Thessalonians, written by the apostle Paul, he was writing in a time when the Christian church was facing persecution, and the early Christians were fighting about sound theology, and his word of hope to them, in the midst of fear and gloominess was, 'May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for another and for all, and may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness' (3:12-13a). He answered the **how** question, increase and abounding in love for one another, when the world and the signs seem uncertain.

From the beginning of recordings of scripture, and as stories were told in the oral tradition, the prophets and leaders were always trying to show people of God that God is in their present time, here and now – not out there somewhere, hovering and disconnected. God's kingdom is here and now, in you and in me, and in all people.

The theological assumption we have of grace and salvation is being challenged today – challenging us to see God in our midst, challenging us to re-evaluate how we are living in the meantime, or as I like to phrase it, the right now. How are we living - hoping for something to come to us, or are we living as though that hope is already here? Faith is not a sort of fee-for-service arrangement we have with God, Faith is the gift of the kingdom of God, and all that it has to offer us (grace, peace, hope, justice) – here and now and for all eternity.

How then shall we live, no longer having to worry about the what's or the when's of the future? The new light of Advent is [of course Jesus] – God's gift of hope – the One who was, who is, and who is to come. He is the One, who in his teaching and preaching showed the world that salvation was not only near, but here and now and fully realized in the here after. "Jesus reminds us that he is the Lord of history and, because we trust that he will in time bring all things to a good end, we can **in the meantime** stand together in courage and compassion and treat all persons with the love of God we have known in God. This is the

hope that is the hallmark of Christian community, the hope that rings throughout Scripture each time a biblical character sings that summary of the Gospel, “Do not fear.”⁴

God in Christ is coming because God loves us – because God wants to redeem us. In the midst of fear and uncertainty, Jesus calls us to 'stand up and raise our heads – not because we are looking for the signs of when it will all happen, but so that that we can see God's kingdom drawing nearer to us each day and finds ways to participate in the inbreaking of God's love.⁵

“Our communities can be places of light and hope, courage and confidence that welcome all those struggling with fear and darkness. We continue to be messengers of hope, with the words that come at the end of this season, that the light of Christ shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has, and I will add, will not overcome it.”⁶

So maybe, on this first Sunday of Advent, Christians will hear a message of hope and peace, one that is not just for the Advent and Christmas season, like they were hoping for, but one that will change their lives here and now and for all eternity. That the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things, is unfolding in our midst, and inviting us to join in the bringing of the kingdom of God to earth here and now.

⁴ Lose, David. *Advent 1C: Stand up and Raise Your Heads* (November 23, 2015), <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/advent-1-c-stand-up-and-raise-your-heads/>.

⁵ Bartlett, David Lyon. *Feasting on the Word*, 24.

⁶ Lose, David. *Advent 1C*.