

The Advent of Hope: Hope begins in the dark . . . and orients us to God

Explore hope in four scenes:

- Hope begins in the dark . . . and orients us to God (Jeremiah)
- Hope looks honestly at the world . . . and equips us to be holy (Malachi)
- Hope brings us to God's presence . . . and grounds us in the presence of one another (Zephaniah)
- Hope gestures towards peace . . . and overcomes our segregations (Micah)

Jeremiah 33:14-16

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. 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 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."

"It was a dismal moment in the life of God's people. The capitol city was in ruins. The government was forced into exile. The temple had been violated. The assault on Jerusalem had put faith into free fall, with endless acrimony about who caused the destruction, who failed, who was at fault. The economic, political confusion evoked hard theological questions:

- Was God dead or absent or fickle?
- Was Israel rejected, no longer chosen?
- Was any future possible, because they could not see any way forward?

They did not know the answer to any of these hard questions. They could only weep. The sadness soaked into the bones of mothers and fathers who knew that their children would not have it as good as they had had it.

And then, right in the middle of their despair comes this Jeremiah, this highly suspect nobody without credentials. He was already known to them. He had been a thorn in the side of the establishment for a long time with his savage poetry. He had been a critic of scandalous imagination with his offensive poetic images. They expected he would deliver yet another verbal whack at them when he started to speak.

But he did not. Perhaps he judged that they had had enough from him in the key of B flat. He shifted gears and changed tone. And then he said:

The days are surely coming..." (Walter Brueggemann, *Etched in Flesh*)

Advent and Hope

- Advent is a season where the darkness of our world – including our chaos and confusion – is met with a divine announcement: "*The days are surely coming.*"

- It is a season that looks back to a single birth and looks forward to the end of time and brings it all into the present moment where we are called to address where we have gone astray and become lost through our denial of God and one another so that we can move forward, wounds and all, towards the future that God intends.
- Hope names the strength God gives us to make this forward movement with confidence that we are not alone (God knows us) nor are our struggles for justice and love for nothing. We begin in darkness and Advent hope orients to the light of God's presence.

“Hope is something deep within each of us that is oriented to a future that God is calling/drawing us into, where we see the “big story” and we participate in acts of beauty, justice, and love that reflect the restoration of all creation that God is bringing about.” (Kate Bowler)

- Where do you see and experience the kind of hope that is a “future that God is calling/drawing you into”?
- What are you willing to risk or give up in order to step towards this future?