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United Methodist Church

November 29, 2009

“In Those Days!”

Rev. Rusty Butler

Jeremiah 33:14-16

I don't know about you but this switching from Thanksgiving to Advent all in the course of a long weekend is enough to throw a person off their game. I like the years where you have Thanksgiving, then a weekend in November, and then the first week of Advent starts in December. That seems right to me, gives us a little break. But the calendar won't make exceptions. So here we are, Thanksgiving, then boom...right into the four week period of Advent.

Do you get the Denver Post? On Thanksgiving it was about twice as big as a Sunday paper with all the advertisements for Black Friday and what some have called Psychotic Saturday. Way more ads than news. There's something not quite right with all that.

Some of you told me you got up real early on Friday morning to get to a store to get something special. One person said they got up and went out at 4:00 a.m. to go to a place and then when they got there they still didn't get what they were hoping for. I don't think that is right...if you get up that early you should get the thing you wanted.

I read yesterday that some of the stores in the Castle Rock outlet mall opened at 11:00 p.m. on Thanksgiving Night to give people a head start and the comment from one analyst was that in the next few years, Thanksgiving will be the day when people do their shopping. I don't know. I hope not.

I couldn't help thinking to myself, are people really ready for this...for Advent already? I have my doubts, we had the Hanging of the Greens on Friday night; I think we had about 15 people show up for that. Not a very big turnout. My theory is that people weren't quite ready for Advent. Mike McHenry, our custodian and I put up the big tree in the Sanctuary on Friday afternoon. It took us just about 3 ½ hours. I don't know if you can remember back to Friday afternoon. It was about 70 degrees. We put that Christmas tree up on what will no doubt be the last 70 degree day in the year. That can make a pastor and a custodian cranky. I don't know about you but it's not Advent when it is 70 outside.

I think next year we should decorate the church on the first Tuesday night in December...combine it with the 50+ crew helping and it doesn't matter whether or not the first Sunday the church will be all decorated. I think it'll be ok. We'll see if that passes!

Are you ready for an Advent sermon? You can't get around it. The bulletins we order...they have one, two, three and four candles on the covers for the four weeks. And then there is the Advent wreath, you couldn't have Hope and Joy be all in one week. It would throw things off. No, you've got to do it right, you've got to squeeze in the four weeks, doesn't matter the timing. You might not have known that Advent originally began as a six week period back in the 400's. If we kept that tradition we'd have Advent and Thanksgiving at the exact same time. Who knows what could happen if you've got them both going on at the same time?? Chaos!

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Would you pray with me?

O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts help us prepare for this Advent Adventure. Amen.

In her book, “Manger and Mystery”, Marilyn Brown Oden, suggests that Advent is a time of longing for life to be different, a time of waiting in hopeful anticipation.

Waiting in hopeful anticipation.

The question is, “What are we waiting for?”

The church’s proposal is that we are waiting for the second coming of Christ. And for the people who put the lectionary readings together, that is why Jeremiah shows up here on the first Sunday of Advent. Jeremiah is waiting for a future in which a descendent of King David will attain the throne in Jerusalem and execute justice and righteousness.

Now just a little bit of background about Jeremiah, I think it helps us.

Jeremiah was the son of an out of favor priest who preached in Jerusalem from about 630 BCE to the time when the temple was destroyed in Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Around the year 587/586. BCE.

He was especially hard on the officials in the temple and with the rulers in Jerusalem. In fact, for a time he was put in jail for his outspokenness.

So this morning’s words from Jeremiah seem to have been written after the temple was destroyed and the leaders and many people in Jerusalem were taken away to Babylonia. These are his words of hope. What he’s waiting for is a return to the glory days of King David.

That’s what he’s waiting for.

What are we waiting for? I doubt many of us are waiting for the literal second coming of Christ on the clouds. I think if we are honest, we are waiting for something different, that looks different than that, feels different than that. But we are waiting.

There is a story about a little boy that could not wait to get to high school. The high school kids seem to have so much fun. Once he got to high school however, he noticed that the people, like his sister who had gone off to college were having more fun than he was. He could not wait to get to college. But college seemed to drag on after a time and he was tired of all the homework. He couldn’t wait to get out of school, get a job and make some money. When he got his first job, it seemed as though people who were really happy were the ones with a wife or a husband, a couple of children and a home with a back yard-maybe even a family dog. But once he was married and had two children and a

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mortgage and a dog, he envied those couples whose children had gone away to college. They had so much more time for each other. Finally his children left for college but the burden of a mortgage and tuition was so heavy he couldn't wait to be out of debt, pay of his house and retire. Then he could have some real fun like all those people who move to Arizona and play golf every day. Then one day in the early winter of his life standing at the tee of the 18th hole of the golf course near Phoenix he thought to himself, "what's the point?" (story from Rev. Carolyn Waters, Christ UMC)

I suspect that story hits closer to home for some of us than we'd like to admit!

What are we waiting for?

I do not know what you are waiting for.

We are all waiting for something...

The Republicans are waiting for the next election cycle

The unemployed are waiting for that job offer to come

The lonely are waiting for a friend

The teenagers are waiting for Christmas vacation.

The sick are waiting for health to return.

The hungry are waiting for food.

The trapped are waiting to find a way out.

The church is looking for the second coming of Jesus Christ and I think they have settled on the fact that if we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the first coming that that might be the closest they come to the second coming.

One poet put it this way, "O God, we wait for your coming as a woman longs for the birth, the exile for her home, the lover for the touch of his beloved, and the humble poor for justice." (Janet Morley from "Bread of Tomorrow")

John Bell has written a poem about Advent. It goes like this:

"You keep us waiting.  
You, the God of all time.  
Want us to wait  
For the right time in which to discover  
Who we are, where we are to go,

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Who will be with us, and what we must do.  
So thank you for the waiting time.

You keep us looking.  
You the God of all space,  
Want us to look in the right and wrong places  
For signs of hope,  
For people who are hopeless,  
For visions of a better world which will appear  
Among the disappointments of the world we know.  
So thank you for the looking time.

You keep us loving.  
You, the God whose name is love,  
Want us to be like you-  
To love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;  
To love without jealousy or design or threat;  
And, most difficult of all,  
To love ourselves.  
So thank you for the loving time.”

Really, what are you waiting for during this Advent time?