

Jeremiah 33: 14-16
Luke 21: 25-36
December 2, 2012
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
First Sunday of Advent

This morning we begin the spiritual journey of Advent. As its name suggests, Advent is about what is to come. It is about future. For Christians Advent is about much more than the coming of the celebration of Christmas. It is even about more than the birth of Jesus. After all, Jesus has *already come!* What is next? What future is making its advent in us and among us?

Historically Advent has lifted up the faith that, while Jesus has come, has died on the cross and risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, the story is not complete. Traditionally we have identified the completion of the story with the belief that one day Jesus will return and bring human history as we know it to a close. Yet, after nearly 2000 years of waiting, most of us have stopped expecting Jesus return in our lifetimes. Instead we quite naturally identify “the end” with our deaths.

So what do we do with this season of preparation? What are we preparing for and how are we preparing? As participants in the cultural festival of *The Holidays* we can answer that question easily. We are preparing for the celebration of the festival: sending cards, buying presents, decorating our homes, hosting and attending holiday parties, getting ready to travel or receive family. It’s all good. I’ve stopped wringing my hands over it.

But we who gather here are clearly preparing for something more. For us, this *future* has little to do with the festival. The festival is part of the cycle of the seasons by

which we mark our earthly lives. The *future* which is at the heart of the season of Advent is about an altogether different reality. It has to do with a divine dimension of time. It has to do with big picture which, like the curved dome of the sky overarches our daily lives. And like that sky, it is also the atmosphere which we breathe. It is great and *it is invisible*. This future is part of that great and ultimate reality of the right here right now which is God present with us.

Uh oh. I can hear you thinking, "Stewart, you lost me there."

OK. So, this is what I want you to do. We will take a brief moment of silence. In that moment of silence I want you to breathe deeply and slowly. Let your muscles relax and your mind grow quiet. Release to God all of the chattering, worrying, all the anticipation of what you have to do or what is waiting for you when you get home. Gaze at the stained glass windows or become aware of the light in the sanctuary. When you find your thinking has abducted you go back to the breathing. Notice how you are feeling. Notice how your heart rate is slowing down. Hear the quiet.

Friends, as we begin the journey of Advent together, I propose to you that in this brief spiritual exercise you have answered the two questions I posed at the beginning. What are we preparing for? We are preparing to receive the Prince of peace! How are we preparing? We are preparing by becoming peaceful. Put differently, by engaging in this simple practice we are opening our lives to receive the peace of God in Jesus Christ.

We miss the point if we seek the meaning of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany in the historic fact that Jesus was born in the past and the faith that he will return sometime in the future. The secret of this sacred season is that Jesus who was born to

Mary and Joseph and who promises to return *seeks to be born in you and me right here and right now*. We are the bearers of the divine mystery which seeks to be known in our lives. This is the future that is seeking to be born into the world as Good News of a great joy meant for all people.

We will miss the point of Jesus' teaching in Luke if we take our eyes off of Jesus and his seeking to be born in us and instead focus on all the dramatic events around us. If what we are preparing for is the end of the world then there is no difference between our voices and all the voices of doom which rain down upon us.

But if we prepare for the coming of the Prince of Peace by seeking to receive Christ's peace and actually becoming peaceful, then we will become beacons of hope. The light of Jesus will shine through us as a beacon light in a storm. We will become the peace that Jesus seeks to bring into the world.

Let's not keep Christ in Christmas so much as to become signs of his presence.
Amen.