

Jeremiah 33: 14-16
Luke 21: 25-37
November 29, 2015
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
First Sunday of Advent

Two weeks ago I had a very clear but very strange dream. I was living in a land that was terrorized by dinosaurs. The dream is clearly the result of seeing too many ads for the movie, “Jurassic World.” Somehow I made my way to the shore of a body of water. I went to change into my swim suit and announced that I intended to go swimming. Someone said, “There are pteranadons in the water. At this point, filled with frustration and indignation I shouted, “There are no dinosaurs! I will live as if there are no dinosaurs! In the dream I felt as if I was making a declaration of independence. I was declaring that the dinosaurs were projections of my fears. I must confess that I did not actually go into the water. And as I rolled out of bed, felt my feet on the floor and saw the light streaming through the window, I sighed with relief, “No dinosaurs!”

I tell this story because to me it has everything to do with the terrible and chaotic events that dominate the news these days. Thanks to the 24 hour news cycle which reports every horror every hour all the time down to the last gruesome and heart wrenching detail and compounds the trauma by non-stop partisan commentary we are numb with pain, fear and outrage. We become suspicious of strangers—especially those of different nationalities and religions. We demand that governments *do something* about this; by which we mean stop the violence and return the world to being a safe place.

But in the depths of our hearts most of us know that there is no simple solution to the violence and terror. There is no *thing to do* which, if we did it would make the problems go away. History shows over and over again that our simple short term

solutions for deep and complex problems often have unforeseen and unhappy consequences. But when we feel powerless in the midst of what feel like uncontrollable evil forces we come to believe that we are abandoned in a hostile and dangerous world. And when this happens we try to withdraw into the safest, most protected place; or we take the law into our own hands and behave in the very same violent way that our enemies do.

That is why, at the beginning of this season of Advent, I am reminded of a number of reasons why I am a Christian.

The very first reason is this: faith in Jesus as revealed in scripture provides a way to stay sane, compassionate and joyful even in times like these.

To begin with, scripture reminds me that ever since the catastrophe of the events in the Garden of Eden, times have always been *times like these*. The violent entry of the Israelites into Canaan took place in times like these. The violent destruction Palestine and of Jerusalem were times like these. The daily practice of greed, slavery, oppression of the poor and worship of idols decried by the prophets were all *times like these*. Yet in the midst of such times Jeremiah speaks of a righteous branch in whom peace will come. He will be called, “The Lord is Our Righteousness.”

In today’s reading from Luke Jesus announces the signs of the end of this age human history. Nation will rise against nation; earthquakes, famines, floods and tsunamis; people fainting from terror. The people who heard Jesus say these things recognized that he was describing their times. The people who heard this teaching recognized that he was describing their times. Indeed every generation hears these words and thinks, “Jesus is speaking of *times like these!*”

I am a Christian in part because our faith is so realistic. We do not hide from the cruel realities of life. We recognize the humans are broken individually and when broken people get together broken things happen. We also recognize that since the Garden of Eden there has never been a halcyon past where there was no war, poverty, oppression and the rest of human and natural calamity. We are sinners who live in a world of sin all of our own making. We are neither surprised nor discouraged by times like these.

And this leads to a second reason why I am a Christian. There is a power that created the universe and continues to create the universe. The scripture tells me that all life is sacred, that is, is an active presence of then presence of the Creator. The power is not impersonal and some abstract principle of particle physics. This power of creativity's very nature is generous *love*. To the great Jewish mystics, the One we call the Lord created the universe in a burst of loving, exuberant creativity. The Lord created living things, especially humans to receive life as a gift and to let God know how thankful they are by receiving the gift, sharing it with others, caring for the gift of creation and extending God's creativity with love. These mystics explain the brokenness of humanity and creation as the refusal of human beings to accept God's gifts on God's terms—that is as grateful children. We wanted to be like God.

When all of God's efforts to bring humanity back into proper relationship failed, as a Christian I believe that God sent a human being who perfectly modeled the relationship which he wants all people to have with God, with other humans and the creation. Through receiving the gift of Jesus, God's son, in full submission to the love which he gives, I begin a journey of discovering personal peace and become a sign of that peace in the world. I begin to awaken to a world where love, not hate, renunciation, not

power, compassion not manipulation and trust not fear become the true powers which guide the universe. In short, I begin to live in a world where there are no dinosaurs.

Today I want you reflect on these thoughts as we begin the Advent season. There is real anguish in the world. There is real evil. As Advent Christians we are called to recognize that there really is profound human suffering which we are meant to share and seek to heal. Yet we are meant to recognize that at the same time all humanity and all creation is holy. We cannot locate evil in any one nation, religion or political/economic system. Why because we recognize that we are broken as well. The same sense of rage and powerlessness that shows itself in fear, violence and terror, resides in us. Advent is impart, a time to own our brokenness not be quick to judge others. Indeed it is a time to become part of God's mending to seek out those we have hurt and ask for forgiveness.

But the great part of Advent is the joy and anticipation that even and especially in times like these, we are not abandoned. The world is not abandoned. We are not powerless and the world is not powerless. God the great power of creative love is alive. He has shown his yearning for wholeness in his creation in sending Jesus into the world during times like these. We journey toward Bethlehem that we will find a savior. *He is our righteousness—not we ourselves, not our religion, race, political outlook.*

As we look to Jesus we become a cradling place for the baby. We become a sign of his return. Amen.