

Ready or Not, Here I Come
Jeremiah 33: 14-16
Ann Hatfield

No sooner do we finish saying Happy Thanksgiving, then we begin asking, “Are you ready for Christmas?” Invariably, at the end of November (or even at the beginning of December) I am NOT READY! I still have elaborate plans for handwritten cards, homemade cookies, spectacular decorations, and – of course – a beautiful Christmas tree.

In reality, it is mid-December before we EVEN PURCHASE a tree – let alone wrestle it into a stand, get it in the house, and trim it with lights and ornaments. So, having grown older and wiser, I often smile and say, “Ready or not, Christmas IS coming!”

Today we celebrate the beginning of Advent – a season of waiting and preparation. As the start of the new church year, Advent draws us into a narrative of hope and promise. With great expectation, we prepare – once again – for the coming of the Christ Child into our lives, our communities, and our world.

This morning, we begin our Advent preparations with a word from the Prophet Jeremiah – spoken to a despairing and defeated people around the 6th century BCE. With the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem, the conquering Babylonian army turned their world upside down through acts of violence and injustice.

Today’s passage is a rare word of hope, from an Old Testament prophet known more for his message of doom and gloom. Here, Jeremiah predicts a future of security, when a new king will establish justice and righteousness for the people:

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made . . .

¹⁵In 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. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.”

Unlike when we ask, “Are you ready for Christmas?” Jeremiah’s prophecy that the days are surely coming is NOT a reference to the number of shopping days until December 25th!!!

Rather, speaking to people in the midst of great suffering and at the edge of despair, Jeremiah points to a future when God’s promise to protect and restore will be fulfilled – justice, righteousness, and safety will reign in God’s kingdom.

When our sons – Dan and Mike – were young, we all enjoyed playing hide-and-seek. I’d start counting, 10, 9, 8, 7 . . . , and they would hide. Finishing the countdown, I’d call

out, “Ready or not, here I come,” and the search would begin! Early on, there were times when Dan and Mike hid in plain sight, like this:

It quickly became obvious this game of hide-and-seek was NOT going to last very long!!!

Eventually, Dan and Mike got to be masters of hiding. Then, it seemed almost overnight, playing hide-and-seek lost its thrill. Perhaps it had to do with the growing number of times they got tired of waiting to be found.

One of them would come from the attic or the basement to verify we actually were TRYING to find them, only to discover we were NOT fully in active child-seeking-mode! We were not keeping our promise to look for them.



At this time and in these days, we live with a certain amount of anxiety and fear about the future. Just this week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported life expectancy in the United States dropped again last year. An alarming statement on our country’s health, it points to a nation caught in an escalating opioid epidemic and growing number of suicides – both signs of deep, human despair.

Additionally, this week a Chinese scientist stunned and alarmed the world by claiming he created the first genetically modified babies, by editing the genes of twin girls while embryos. So, it is not surprising that these and other headlines can feel like a message of doom and gloom – one that might cause us to want to crawl under the bed or hide behind the curtains.

This is one reason we immerse ourselves in Advent – a four-week-long season of waiting and preparation – EVERY YEAR. Like skeptical children playing hide-and-seek, we need to be reminded of the ONE who is actively seeking us – Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel. With the incarnation of Christ, God takes on human flesh to dwell with you and me. Ready or not, God comes in Jesus – as one of us.

As people of faith, when the worries of life threaten to send us into a pit of despair, Jeremiah’s words ring clearly: “The days are surely coming, when I will fulfill the promise I made.” With God, a promise made is a promise kept.¹ In Jesus Christ, God promises, “Ready or not, here I come.” God promises not only to seek and find us – but also to claim, sustain, and redeem us!

That is our hope: God promises to make the world right again – to protect and restore creation. But you and I know, God’s promise does not eliminate fear or hardship from our lives. Pain, loss, and grief remain, and the headlines may still send us into emotional hiding. However, we also know it is often when circumstances appear darkest that the promise of God shines brightest.²

The Light of Christ has already come into the world, and it will come again. It is a Light that dispels darkness and casts out fear. It is a Light that allows our imaginations to

glimpse a vision of God's promised future – a day when God WILL turn things right-side-up. It is a Light that even shines within each of us, when we demonstrate compassion to those who are hurting, solidarity with those who are oppressed, forgiveness for those who have wronged us, and love towards all God's people.³

Yes – as we look to the future – we pray, “While we are waiting come.” But we also know there is much work to be done – here and now. And as followers of Jesus, God invites us to be co-laborers. The evidence of God's kingdom not only abides in our hearts, but it also guides our actions. Longing for God's day of justice and righteousness to be fulfilled, we must have the courage to live into it – to work faithfully and diligently towards it.

Advent invites you and me into a hopeful season of waiting and preparation. It is a time of joyful expectation – not so much because our small actions might radically change the world, but because we know the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have ALREADY changed the world.⁴ Let us LIVE that expectation! So – ready or not, light the candles!!! The season of Advent has come!

Amen.

¹ Joanna M. Adams, *Christian Century*, November 28, 2006.

² William Dyrness, *Christian Century*, November 16, 1994.

³ David Lose, “In the Meantime,” November 28, 2018.

⁴ Ibid.