

Advent 1 Sermon
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Jeremiah 33.14-16
Matthew 24.36-44
November 27, 2022

Deer travel in pairs, at the very least. Sometimes they travel in more than twos. When I learned how to drive my parents would remind me that if I saw one deer cross the road, I should always wait because a second deer would almost always be nearby. Yesterday I drove by the high school to go to the store and I saw a group of people gathered across the street, staring at the high school. When I followed their gaze, I realized that they were looking at a deer in the field just outside the school. The deer seemed frozen in place. As I looked further, two patrol cars were also there. I thought it strange that the deer didn't move. Twenty minutes later I drove back the same way. The crowd remained, the patrol cars remained, the deer remained in the exact same spot. The only change was the addition of a truck in which a man in an orange hat was exiting. There was plenty in this scene to leave me unsettled - the hunter, the crowd, the police, but also a lone deer who hadn't moved in over twenty minutes with so many people surrounding it. My guess is the deer was injured.

A deer in a field isn't unusual. One by itself in the middle of the day is odd, but one who doesn't move surrounded by people means something is not right. The Matthew passage we read today tells of people left - a sign of something coming, a sign of something that isn't quite right. We begin our first Sunday in Advent thinking about waiting, of salvation, and of staying awake. Advent is Latin meaning "to come," and this four-week journey leads us to the celebration of the birth of Christ and a hope for his return. It is the perfect encompassing of the Community Organizing idea of the world as it is versus the world as it should be - and that we are stuck in this uneasy place.

When we recognize that this world is not as it should be, we stay awake - not as in staying awake at night, though I have lost plenty of sleep over the injustices of the world. It also is not referring to the term "woke," though those who name injustices in the world and as it should be are often labeled as "woke." The people are awake because they are aware - they are paying attention.

Many have translated Advent passages and predictions of Jesus' return as a rapture - of people being left behind. It is an idea built on the concept that there are people living the "wrong" way and that Jesus would not welcome people because of it. These scriptures are actually less prescriptive and more metaphorical and a warning to be aware, to pay attention and live with intention. The people left in the field were those living without awareness, not thinking twice about their actions and how they impacted others.

Those left in the field, those who were caught off guard, are then disconnected with community. Though, my guess is they were disconnected from community to begin with - unaware of how their lives were entangled in the lives of others. They are confused and alone. The passage we read looks backwards and forwards. It reminds readers of Noah and the flood - a

destructive event that was unsettling and sudden - that also reminds people of God's faithfulness and promise not to flood the earth again.

While I was in Ireland someone said, "Memory is the doorway to hope," meaning that when we tell history, when we tell accurate history, we can build a better, more informed future. As we think about the first Sunday in Advent as representing hope, our memory can help us move ahead to the future with hope. And memory must be communal - because we all see and experience events differently. When we tell our stories and learn from one another we have a more holistic view of history. We have a better understanding of how we are connected to one another, and how our actions affect one another and the earth.

The Gospel reading also precedes Matthew 25, which we read monthly - the reminder that we are called to clothe the naked and feed the hungry and care for the sick. It reminds us that in looking back, we also must look forward - and that future God promises only happens when we can work together and care for one another using the gifts God has given us.

We find hope in the Jeremiah passage, which is not Advent based but comes from the people in exile - a people who were searching for hope after being separated from their families and the familiar. They had to wait. They expected. They saw that there was life after death and destruction. Out of sorrow would be joy.

Salvation is something that we will explore over the coming weeks. This passage talks about saving - and when we think about salvation we often think about being saved from something or someone. It is a concept that doesn't make much sense in some of the other faith traditions because sorrows and suffering are part of the human experience in other faiths. It isn't something one is saved from, but that one learns how to cope with and move through collectively. Salvation is also translated as liberation, which is understood in other faith traditions. Life is messy, as is salvation and liberation. Advent is also messy. We want to wrap it up in pretty bows and bells and candles but the journey to the world as it should be is very messy.

Ross Gay is one of my favorite poets and he writes about joy and delight in an extremely messy and human way - making it so relatable and reminding us of the complexities of life. In his latest book, *Inciting Joy*, he writes: "What I am advocating, and adamantly so, is that rather than quarantining ourselves or running from sorrow, we lay down our swords and invite sorrow in. I'm suggesting we make sorrow some tea from the lemon balm in the garden. We let sorrow wash up and take some of our clothes. We give sorrow our dad's slippers that we've hung onto for fifteen years for just this occasion. And we drape our murdered buddy's scarf, still smelling of nag champa, over sorrow's shoulders to warm them up some. As we're refilling their tea we notice sorrow is drinking from a mug given to us by someone we've hurt."¹ Inviting sorrow to the table might bring up more hurt. It might bring up more struggles. It might also help us to release some of what is within us - to remember, that memory giving us hope, and fueling us to change the future.

¹ Ross Gay, *Inciting Joy*. (North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2022), 4-5.

May we be strengthened by our faith memory, remembering those saints who have gone before us, and to give thanks, and trust that even though the world is not as it should be, we have been given what we need from God to make it the way God intended. Keep awake, friends.
Amen.