

“Hope Reawakened”

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Psalm 25:4-10 & Jeremiah 33:14-16

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As a young boy, my family took me to the Paul Bunyan Logging Camp Museum. I was in awe of the tall tales of mighty lumberjacks. A large swath of towering trees was cut with every mere flick of Paul's axe-wielding arm. His trusty blue ox, Babe, would carry the trees to the mill. Upon returning to the farm, I wanted to chop down a tree. I failed to think through my haphazard plan. In the machine shed, I found an old rusty axe. With my trusty white Siberian Husky dog, Skeeter, by my side we were going to venture into the woods and cut down a tree. Then Skeeter, since Huskies can be sled dogs, would drag the tree behind the barn where I would fashion the tree into a fort. I wanted to prove myself a lumberjack, so I did not mention any of my plans to anyone. Unfortunately, I did not have the strength of Paul Bunyan. The axe was too heavy to carry to the woods, so new plan, cut down one of the tall skinny pine trees in the third row of the wind break. Soon I discovered that I was not strong enough to swing the axe, so new plan, use a hatchet. It took a month of me sneaking off to cut down the tree. My celebration quickly faded as I discovered Skeeter and I could not even budge the tree. Even if we could move it, I now realized since it took so long to make a single cut it would take years for me to make it into a fort. Suddenly, it dawned on me that my parents would not be pleased with my actions. My poor choice lead to a really, bad, terrible choice. When Dad noticed the fallen tree and asked me about it, I suggested that perhaps a beaver had fell the tree. Promptly Dad took me to Mom and explicitly told me to never ever lie. They explained how lies destroy trust and relationships. They also pointed out all the dangerous things that could have gone wrong. They told me they loved me. However, this was not a situation where I would learn about grace rather the consequences of poor choices, especially to never ever lie. It was pointed out that if I would have told the truth, then the consequences would be far less severe. First, I had to help process and clean up the tree. Second, I had to help dig and plant three new rows of windbreak saplings. Third, it was now my responsibility to replant any dead saplings, water the trees and keep the vegetation trimmed down around the trees, so I would have several years to contemplate the sin, destruction, and wrong of lying. Alas, if only a super fast-growing branch would have emerged from the stump and grown 20 feet in a day to save me.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 NRSV “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In 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. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.””

Advent is a time to be honest with our self, confess our sins, admit we need a savior, look back on God's love in the past, and look forward to all God's love will do in the future. Advent is a season of hope, of longing, expecting, imagining the fulfilment of God's promises of redemption, renewal, and restoration. Advent is a season of active waiting. A time to examine our life, admit our foolishness in our haphazard plans that hurt others. Jesus comes to tear apart our web of illusions and unawareness that we weave about ourselves. Jesus comes to give us a divine wake up call. This is a time to look around at our families, friends, community and world, to see the brokenness, the barren stumps. This is a time to realize the world is a mess, our lives are a mess, and despite our best efforts we cannot clean up the mess. This is a time to admit we need a Savior to clean up our mess for us. A Savior who transforms stumps into vibrant trees. So, Advent is also a celebration of what is coming, liberation from all that diminishes abundant life for every person and the cosmos. God's grace will provide an outpouring of divine energy that will transform all. The grace of the season of Advent is a reawakening of our hope in the salvation that has already come, that comes now, and will come in the fullness of the Day of the Lord. Advent is speaking and singing of divine transformation and restoration. The good news of Advent is hope, a confident expectancy, a bold trust in the promises of God, that despite all that is falling apart in our lives, and world, all will be glorious.

In the wisdom of my parents, caring for the trees gave me much more than contemplating the destruction of lying, it gave my hope to see that the trees I was caring for would grow and protect our farm.

Richard Weyls writes, “The church reminds us that we live in this twilight time between what is dying and what is being born, between the “already” of Christ’s reign and the “not yet” of Advent. The liturgical year draws us into this drama and more deeply into the reality of our lives. We look with horror upon yet another terrorist attack and insinuations of racial inequality as refugees search the world for a welcoming home. On the verge of despair, we hear the comforting words of Jeremiah speaking words of promise to exiles. From the dead, decaying stump a branch of vibrant life will come. Everyone will be saved and live in safety. Everyone will live in righteousness, that is loving relationships with all people. These words sing the melody of Advent: whatever devastation or suffering you experience today is neither permanent nor ultimate, for “your redemption is drawing near.” This is our season to wake up early to “go out in the woods,” “to see growing trees,” and readjust our spiritual senses to waiting, listening, and watching for God. If we do, we open ourselves to the two great sources of healing: the grief that comprehends our current circumstances and the joy that calls to us like music from tomorrow.

David was the mighty towering Redwood tree of hope for the world. David strove to be rooted in God’s glorious unlimited resources and transforming love. David stood firm against Goliaths that sought to divide people with fear, hate, and violence. David united people in love for each other and for God. David passionately worshiped God and united people in praising God. David was so joyful, loving, and hopeful. He was a man after God’s heart. David made a poor choice. Instead of confessing, repenting, and making amends, David told a lie which lead to another poor choice, more lies, and eventually murder. David’s kingdom, family, life, and the hopes of the people were all chopped down. Eventually David did confess, yet the destruction of his poor choices caused him and others great pain. In time, God’s grace healed him and his family, restoring hope. David’s confessing, grieving, clinging, and yearning, opened his soul to visions of God’s promises fulfilled and imaginations of our spectacular future.

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Susan Metz writes, “The days are coming ... Advent—a magical time of year liturgically and seasonally. The darkness has drawn in, days are short. We light our fires and wrap ourselves in bright quilts and warm sweaters. There may already be snow that blankets the earth and wraps it in white silence. These are signs that invite us to slow down, to look around and up and back, to turn completely around so that we see all the signs, all the color, all that an advent offers. Liturgically, we are drawn into preparation for the Incarnation. The prophets’ words are full of promise. Yes, their people had sinned and been dispersed, and some had lost hope. David’s line had been broken; but Jeremiah shouted out that God would bring back justice, would raise up a leader for Israel, would execute righteousness. Lift up your soul and put your trust in God, the Psalmist sings. Show us your ways, O Lord, and teach us your paths. These words should grab our hearts as they grabbed the hearts of Old Testament peoples. The days are coming—yes, but some of those days are here now. We see signs. We can be a sign to others—inviting them to walk with us into the silence and brightness of Advent worship and wonder. Stop, look around, sit in silence someplace where the beauty of the world wraps you in wonder and then sing, “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.”

In caring for the trees, I was partnering with creation, partnering with God in restoring life-giving, sheltering trees, renewing my life, and renewing my relationship with my parents. Advent is a time to imagine everyone and everything permeated with righteousness and to actively live in that peace, compassion, love, and joy now. We are invited in word, actions, and through our living to be prophets who show ourselves and everyone the coming of God’s grace renewing all and transforming all into grand glory.

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 25:4-10 NLT “Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you. Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past. Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O Lord. The Lord is good and does what is right; God shows the proper path to those who go astray. God leads the humble in doing right, teaching them God’s way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep God’s covenant and obey God’s demands.”**

Our expectancy of coming righteousness fills us with joy that increases our love for each other. The Apostle Paul prays, **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSV** “**How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may Jesus so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all God’s saints.**

Righteousness is being in a wholesome, loving right relationship with our self, all people and God. Advent is a celebration of threefold coming righteousness. We celebrate the coming of righteousness in the past, the goodness of creation, freedom in the Promise Land, God’s steadfast saving love, Emmanuel, God with us in the flesh of Jesus. We celebrate the coming of righteousness in the present God’s grace healing us. We celebrate the coming of righteousness in the future, when love is the way.

“When love is the way,” said Bishop Curry, “then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more. When love is the way, there’s plenty good room — plenty good room — for all of God’s children.”

Advent, the celebration of coming righteousness, being in loving relationships with yourself, your parents, all people, God and every tree. Amen