

Advent Promises Hope

Advent 1, Jeremiah 33 (CB)

Teala and I look forward to Christmas yearly. We always get a bit antsy early, Christmas décor and music, because we don't decorate until the first Sunday of Advent each year. I agree with most Canadians who say that Christmas needs to wait until after Remembrance Day. Anything before that feels disrespectful. But now, I am really looking forward to it, putting up the decorations and especially the advent wreath tonight. We can start to really zoom in on the Advent promises of hope, peace, joy and love that are reminded of at this time of year.

This is the time of year when we get to look ahead to the next phase of our lives as Christians especially. It's when we lean into the possibilities of what could be when doubt and uncertainty come our way in the upcoming year. Advent's promises are what will sustain us going forward. We focus on these promises of God, and we get excited about them.

Let's take a look at some of the promises we lean on, as we go about our lives, the promises we hold on to, no matter what.. "Dr. Jerome Frank at Johns Hopkins talks about our "assumptive world." What he means is that all of us make assumptions about life, about God, about ourselves, about others, about the way things are. The things that we cling to as promises of God are tied into this assumptive world.

He argues that when our assumptions are true to reality, we live relatively happy, well-adjusted lives. We are more settled and fulfilled. But when our assumptions are distant from reality, we become confused and angry and disillusioned" Nothing is more

destructive than hoping in failed promises. Do you know what that feels like, to put your hope in something that doesn't materialize?

For instance, when you meet the man or woman of your dreams, and you fall in love, and they promise to be there for you and protect you, and then they end up breaking your heart... Some of us know the impact of that failed promise all too well....I think we all kinda know what that might feel like, and how much it hurts. But if you're courageous, you go on... and date again... and become excited and encouraged when someone else makes that same promise to you all over again.... And you hope that this time they will stand by their promise, and we summon the determination to believe in love again...

Our world is full of promises, promises of things that will give meaning and purpose and value to our lives. Promises that our bad feelings will pass, and that everything is going to be alright. Promises that the sun will come out tomorrow and the day is going to be better than yesterday.

Promises that we're actually better than the negative and destructive things we do and say. Promises that we're strong and smart and loved and liked. And we live our lives by these promises. And our lives reflect the promises that we choose to believe in. If we believe in the promise that we're the ones who will make a difference in an organization or a church, we usually live by that and work through that belief.

Ministers come to mind here. I am staunchly under the belief that the church is changing and transitioning to reflect the world, and that people like me have been called into ministry to foster that change, of bringing the church into the current and future world. I really feel like God's promise to me is that I get to be a leader in

that transition, bringing our amazing church traditions and merging them with new, exciting and innovative ideas, to build a bridge between the secular world and the church.

I have a girlfriend in London who had been an alcoholic since early twenties, and she found herself in many difficult situations because of it. She lost custody of her only child to his father, and decided that it was time to give up alcohol.

She has been clean since, but she always says that she believes that the Universe (her term for God) will maintain her resolve and strength, so that when life becomes difficult, and we all know it does, that she will not fall back on alcohol again. She is resting her sobriety on the promise that God will keep her strong, and she won't backslide into her addiction again. Could you imagine if she ever lost hope in that promise?

We all live and make decisions for our lives based on some promise or another...but so many of us really struggle because we are putting our hopes on promises that are deceiving, self-serving, or false, and which just cannot stand up to anything that is true and meaningful.

I was reading a story about a couple who put all their financial hopes in pyramid schemes. A lot of promises were made to them about how they could make a lot of money. All of it was false, and they got in deeper and deeper, investing more and more time and money into the scheme. In time they lost everything, including the trust of family and friends who they roped into the scheme as well. They learned the hard way about promises that they could not depend on.

Advent, and our relationship with God, is all about promises. Good promises, reliable and dependable promises. Promises that

we could believe in, wrap our minds around and even sink our teeth into. One of the highlights of our relationship with God is that we get to lean into the promise of God that we can be and will be freed from all the things that destroy us. And Advent is a time when we unpack some of the main promises, and are shown how the promises will come to be... through the teachings of a baby born in a manger so many years ago.

Advent replays for us what incredible, huge, glorious promises these are for each and every one of us. The promises that we could always access Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.... Is huge.... This is not a little thing... And when Christmas dawns, when we light this little white candle in the middle, to declare Christ is born, what we are actually celebrating is the fulfillment of the promises of God.

This is a significant thing to remember as we launch Advent and the Christmas season. Throughout these next four weeks we get to focus on the idea that hope, peace, joy and love are promised to us by our Creator, and on Christmas we get to celebrate that the promises are fulfilled, and they are accessible to us in spades... Can I hear you say Gloria... at this incredible news....

Our passage today in Jeremiah is written by the prophet when things looked really bad for his people. About 600 years before Jesus, they are about to be taken away from their Promised Land because for generations they have been not relying on the promise-giver, but on any other sort of promise.

Everything that has given them meaning and identity, it all looks like it will be destroyed. And right then, Jeremiah, says that one will rise up – a Messiah – another David, who will restore Jerusalem to justice and righteousness. The Messiah would

change everything, and the people of Israel were to depend on that promise that they will be fully reconciled unto God and their land. That is our promise too.

You may be facing a difficult time in your lives, where things have shifted and changed and you don't recognize anything. Your family has changed, everyone has gone their own way, your health is changed, you don't recognize your own body parts, they don't do what your brain tells them to do, your world around you is dishevelled, things haven't yet returned since Covid, and it really makes you sad.... Your friends.... They are changing... they are aging, they have slowed down tremendously... feels like they're slowly slipping away...

You wonder what's left in your own life... you know things will never be as they were, but you look for something... to hold on to... to restore your faith and your spirit.... And your energy... If this restoration doesn't happen, this will just be another Christmas.

I'm bringing you a message today, that it doesn't have to be just another Christmas. It could be the Christmas of your life, if you would just focus on the promises of God. That your mind and your soul and your spirit could be restored. If you reach deep and think, and pray that hope, peace, joy and love could be realized in your life, it could make all the difference in your celebrations this year. May it be so, Amen...