

First Sunday of Advent

November 28, 2021

Reflection by Sister Belinda Monahan, OSB

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:4-5,8-9,10,14;; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 24-36

Early this week, I was prepping for RCIA and one of the texts I looked at reminded us that Advent is a time of preparation for *three* comings of Jesus: the familiar, comforting birth of Jesus 2000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem, the coming of Jesus in power and glory at the end of time, and the more mundane appearance of Jesus in our daily lives. Today's readings reflect all three of these "Advents."

In the first reading, Jeremiah prophesies the fulfillment of God's promise—a ruler in David's line; who will bring about a reign of justice, safety and security in Judah and Jerusalem (a prophesy we, of course, understand as referring to Jesus). In the second reading Paul instructs the Thessalonians to continue—and to increase their efforts—to conduct themselves in ways that are pleasing to God. In the Gospel, Jesus alerts the disciples to the signs that will precede his second coming and warns them to be vigilant.

But, of course, we know that these three Advents are not disconnected and separable; in either how we think and feel about them or how we live them out. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem—the commemoration of which we eagerly anticipate—did not come with the kind of pomp and glory that might have been expected from a

ruler in the line of King David. His reign of justice demanded—demands--new visions of what justice might look like. And the coming of the Son of Man—in anticipation of which people will die of fright—Jesus also notes is the time when our redemption is at hand; surely not an event to be feared.

And neither the birth of a child 2000 years ago, in an imperial backwater, nor a apocalypse we cannot plan for is likely to have much meaning or effect on our lives unless we are constantly aware of Jesus' presence in our daily lives. For me, the connection is most apparent in one of my least favorite juxtapositions in the Gospel: Jesus' warning not to be distracted by “carousing and drunkenness” nor by “the anxieties of every day life.” The former seems sensible—being focused on our own fleeting and personal pleasure is likely to distract us from putting Jesus at the center of our lives. But, so apparently can anxiety and worry—leading us away from faith and trust in Jesus.

So, all three of these Advents point us to the coming of Jesus. It might be easier to eagerly anticipate the commemoration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. To prepare a warm and cozy place for a newborn baby, without focusing on the transformation that is entailed by that birth. Or it might be easier to be consumed by worry as we read the signs of the times around us—Covid, racism, natural disasters that are really caused by human abuse of the environment—and anxiously anticipate the coming of the Son of Man. To try to insulate ourselves from

our fears without focusing on the transformation that is entailed by that second coming.

For many of us it is much more difficult—and much more necessary—to focus on Jesus’ Advent in our everyday lives. Sister Virginia’s daily reflection on Facebook today suggested that “a good way to be vigilant is to be mindful, to be present to your life.” To both eagerly *and* anxiously anticipate Jesus’ coming each and every day and to allow that Advent to transform us.