

Sermon for Binkley Baptist Church

The First Sunday of Advent—Hope

December 2nd, 2018

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Las Posadas: Where Can Hope Find Lodging?

Prayer:

Let us pray: God of Advent Hope, make room in our hearts for the arrival of lessons we need today. Amen.

Nativity Story

Now I'm a sucker for good nativity story. Give me a children's re-enactment of Luke Chapter 2, with its first-grade Oscar nominated actors, tinsel-clad angels, distracted shepherds, lambs in fleece pajamas, a proud Mary and Joseph carrying a baby doll Jesus—and I'm as happy as a cozy Christmas kitten by the fireplace.

But that is *not* today's Gospel reading. Come back on Sunday, December 16th, to see our adorable children reenact that story, because folks—we did *not* win the lectionary lottery. Today's Jeremiah and Luke periscopes are what theologians call the "apocalyptic literature." Us regular folks call them hide-under-the-covers scripture.

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord" in Jeremiah 33:14. "Be alert at all times," says Jesus in the Gospel reading we just heard.

It's always fun and games until the prophets and the Jesus starts talking about the end times.

Exegesis of Luke 21: 25-36

But here we are—the first Sunday of *Advent*—from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "arrival" or "coming." Advent is derived from the Greek word *Parousia*, which

refers to the second coming of Christ (UMC). And while we anticipate Christ's coming again, we prepare our hearts and minds annually for the arrival of Baby Jesus. The first Sunday of Advent is always Hope Sunday—but this morning's scriptures aren't exactly *hopeful*.

"The days are coming," with "signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Signs and distress; fear and foreboding. Sound familiar?

If not, let me parse it out for us: oppressors who boast zero-tolerance immigration policies, white nationalism, separation of refugee families, border-slamming, wage-gaps, systemic oppression through education, housing, policies; mass incarceration of people of color, #MeToo, and irreversible climate change. Whew.

Signs and distress; fear and foreboding, indeed.

But this is not a "Prepare for the rapture!" sermon. I'm not advising you to collect your "Hearty Survival Buckets" from the JimBakkerShow.com—that's a *real* thing, by the way—they were on Cyber Monday sale this week for \$145 each.

No, no. As critical thinkers and students of scripture, we know that Jeremiah's narrative is 2,600 years old and Luke's gospel is recorded between 85 and 95 C.E. In other words—it's been a while since the prophet and Jesus made these decrees, and we are all still waiting (Tiede 1760).

Rather than predicting our rapture date—we are invited to exegete a deeper meaning for *today*, especially from Luke's "Eschatological—meaning "concerning the end times"—Discourse."

Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Luther Seminary, David L. Tiede argues that the Gospel attributed to Luke must be read on two levels: first, as an “orderly account” of Jesus’s life, ministry, and instruction—but secondly, as a Gospel that is fundamentally “concerned with addressing social and theological issues of crucial importance to the church of the author’s own time” (Tiede 1759). Luke makes literary and narrative decisions to demonstrate how this new church stands in both “continuity with the ancient people of God, yet also represents a new development that fulfills God’s purpose of universalizing salvation.” Tiede offers: Luke’s goal is also to “address the relationship of Christianity to its social environment” (Tiede 1760). I’d argue that Luke’s goal is *still* relevant for us today.

How does Christianity address its relationship to its social environment?

Las Posadas. Lodging. Sanctuary. Hope.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord”

“Be alert at all times,” says Jesus.

What’s *most* interesting about Luke’s Eschatological Discourse is that it departs from its synoptic counterparts (Matthew and Mark), by *keeping* Christ’s teaching *inside* the temple area. While Matthew and Mark say that Jesus *left* temple and to teach this final days lesson plan, Luke says Jesus remains *inside* the temple grounds (Brown 254).

What does mean? Luke is writing in 85 C.E., he knows that the temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. by the Romans, two generations after Jesus’s death (Brown 255). Jesus even foretells of its destruction earlier in Luke’s Gospel. I wonder if Luke situating the apocalyptic message *inside* the temple grounds is meant to bring the sense of *urgency* closer to our spiritual homes—and hearts.

Today—the “temple”—many churches—have become an *actual*—not just spiritual—home or lodging.

This year, Durham’s CityWell United Methodist Church—a “sanctuary church,” lodged Samuel Oliver-Bruno in “sanctuary ministry”—which is when congregations covenant to house individuals threatened by deportation. Samuel lived there for 11 months. Traditionally, I.C.E.—Immigration and Customs Enforcement—agents will not make arrests inside or on the grounds of house of worship. Thus, the “sanctuary movement,” is a growing ministry among American congregations seeking to live in solidarity with immigrants and refugees (Krueger and Leslie).

But the Friday after Thanksgiving, Samuel *voluntarily* left church sanctuary. He had a scheduled appointment at U.S. Customs and Immigration Services Office in Morrisville, NC to complete legal forms in hopes of returning to work and remaining in the U.S. with his very ill wife, Julia, and their son, Daniel Oliver-Perez, a U.S. born citizen (Krueger and Leslie).

CityWell Church knew Samuel was taking a risk to leave his literal sanctuary—his *lodging*—and so the church bought its community with him. Samuel was accompanied to the USCIS by his family, as well as CityWell parishioners and its pastor, Cleve May (Krueger and Leslie).

But at the USCIS, Samuel was tackled by plain-clothed I.C.E agents. While his Pastor Cleve and son Daniel tried to shield him from arrest, Samuel was handcuffed and placed in a minivan for transfer. Outside, CityWell congregants encircled the vehicle. But they did not express hatred for Samuel’s oppressors; instead they worshipped with hope, just as they would in the church sanctuary. In non-violent protest, they sang hymns and prayed (Wilson-Hartgrove).

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Durham activist, wrote this week that 27 people were arrested while trying to “extend the religious sanctuary of their church building to this place of public witness.” Wilson-Hartgrove says that “when the last woman was handcuffed, she fell to her knees and lay down in front of the minivan. As the arresting officers carried her away, she sang, “We shall not, we shall not be moved” (Wilson-Hartgrove).

Pleas, vigils, and the #FreeSamuel hashtag emerged in the coming days. Binkley’s own Congressman David Price released a statement:

“Samuel’s sudden and inappropriate arrest in the middle of the Thanksgiving season reflects the callous and cruel approach we’ve come to expect from [this] administration” (Price)

“This was a bait-and-switch,” said Pastor Cleve. “A legal process was put into place that was used as the bait to pull Samuel out of sanctuary” (Krueger and Leslie).

Samuel was subsequently transferred to detention centers in Georgia and Texas, and ultimately deported to Mexico on Thursday. America—the country where he worked, raised a family, and called home for 22 years, slammed its doors on him, declaring “no room at the inn” (Flynn).

Las Posadas. Lodging. Sanctuary. Hope.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord”

“Be alert at all times,” says Jesus.

Samuel’s story emphasizes the *urgency and connection* of Luke’s placement of Jesus’s teachings *inside the temple*. Gospel work begins in the literal sanctuary with hope and loving-kindness. Though temples will be destroyed, (twice in Biblical times), bricks will crumble, homes will be abandoned in war and political instability, safe-haven

lodging can be ripped away in an instant—**but hope built in sanctuary extends far past literal lodging.**

Where can hope find lodging?

Oh, Lord, where can hope find lodging?

Hope finds lodging in us—in *people. In community.*

Hope cannot be demolished when it finds lodging in people.

In the book *On Race* by Dr. George Yancy, Dr. Cornel West says, “You can be full of fire, but that fire has to be lit by a deep love of people ... [and] when you love people, you hate the fact that they are being treated unfairly ... You tell the truth. You sacrifice your popularity for integrity.” (Yancy 265)

Let me say it again. “You sacrifice your popularity for integrity.”

I’ll add:

You sacrifice your privilege for integrity.

You sacrifice your convenience for integrity.

Las Posadas. Lodging. Sanctuary. Hope. HOME.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord”

“Be alert at all times,” says Jesus.

Be Alert

But what do with all this Eschatological alertness nestled *inside* the temple on the first Sunday of Advent hope?

Paulo Freire, Brazilian activist, advocate of liberation theology tells us to be “upset by injustice, hurt by discrimination, struggle against impunity, and [refuse] cynical and immobilizing fatalism ... [and] we must be full of critical hope” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 70).

He continues, "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women can transform the world. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 88). "Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity; it is a radical posture" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 49).

Binkley Baptist Church has *never* shied away from a radical posture. When I.C.E. detains and deports a faithful man of color lodging in church sanctuary in our own backyard, we are alert. When we are alert, we love our neighbor.

And what do you do when you love people?

"You sacrifice your popularity for integrity." (Dr. Cornel West)

You sacrifice your privilege for integrity.

You sacrifice your convenience for integrity.

This was the posture of Christ, who emptied himself for others.

Lodging: Home and Hope In Our Churches and Hearts

And so on this first Sunday of Advent, we place our hope in a Jewish baby born in a Middle Eastern animal stall to teenage parents who were told there was "no room in the inn." We place our hope in an infant refugee who, with his parents, were forced to flee to Egypt from Judea lest the baby be killed—or we should we say today *tear gassed*—by a narcissistic ruler whose grasp for power was threatened by a poor boy born of the House of David. We place our hope in a homeless, preacher who taught us to be alert *inside* a temple—his spiritual home—or what bell hooks names, "a holy place of spiritual possibility" (Yancy 21)

Las Posadas. Lodging. Sanctuary. Hope. HOME.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord”

“Be alert at all times,” says Jesus.

Dr. Matthew Desmond, Princeton scholar and author of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, writes that “in languages all over the world, the word for home encompasses not just shelter (lodging) but warmth, safety, family—and *the womb*” (Desmond 293)

The *womb*.

Now, isn't that something? *The womb*.

While Desmond calls America's eviction problem “Shameful and unnecessary.” Racist immigration policies are also shameful and unnecessary. But, he writes, “*Because it is unnecessary, there is hope.*”

He cites Dr. King, who said, “Every condition exists simply because someone profits by its existence” (Desmond 305).

Binkley, hope finds lodging through our loving-kindness ministries of stewardship and sustainability; through our engagement with seniors and families, through cultivating and modeling what it means to be a teaching congregation, in our worship and spiritual practice, as well as our public witness of the gospel through policy, advocacy. **Hope finds its lodging in us.**

I'll leave you with Freire's words and a final thought:

“Hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context of our unfinishedness” (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 53, 69).

This Advent Sunday of hope we anticipate the coming, the arrival, the *Parousia* of Christ, which is about the already and the not yet. We live in that space of eagerly

awaiting, and in the “context of our unfinishedness,” we are called to radical hope and loving-kindness for neighbor—and the enemies who persecute them.”

Where can hope find lodging? Hope finds lodging in us.

Amen.

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