

# SERMON FOR DECEMBER 2, 2012

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

## First Sunday in Advent (Year C)

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Jeremiah 33:14-16 (Focus)**; Luke 21:25-36

Message: "Advent 1: God's Reign is Always Near & Christ is Ever Present!"

Kekapa P.K. Lee



## Gathering in the Word

This morning we begin our Advent pilgrimage – our holy walk – to Bethlehem and the Manger with words of hope from the prophet Jeremiah to a people feeling helpless and hopeless. In the Season of Advent we begin the new Church Year and the Year C Lectionary Cycle – which will focus on the Gospel of Luke primarily. And what would we do without Luke? Think about it: if Luke the physician really is the person who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts—you could almost wonder if Luke maybe missed his calling in life. In truth, we have no idea what kind of a doctor Luke was, but what we do know is that he was a fast and good writer and storyteller!

Luke warns us not to give in to fears during the worst of times—public and private apocalypses, calamities, and disasters. If we are truly faithful—we must stand up and raise our heads—because our redemption and salvation is drawing near! (Luke 21:28) Luke records Jesus’ words of apocalypse that anticipates the end of history.

On this First Sunday in Advent Luke is paired with Jeremiah the Prophet and Israel’s own apocalypse. Both Jeremiah and Luke look at such cataclysms and proclaim words of **HOPE!**

## Hearing the Word

**Jeremiah 33:14-16 (NIV 2011)**

<sup>14</sup> “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

<sup>15</sup> “‘In those days and at that time

I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;  
he will do what is just and right in the land.

<sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called:  
The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’

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Before Jeremiah 33—chapter 32—Jeremiah is in prison in the courtyard of King Zedekiah. The reason Jeremiah is under this *house arrest* was because King Zedekiah had heard enough *doom and gloom*, all defeat and destitution. The King had enough of all the bad news and so he locked Jeremiah up in hopes of also *shutting* him up! In chapter 32 Jeremiah was instructed to buy a field—a piece of land—as a *symbol of future hope*.

**So in chapter 33 we get these promising words of prophecy about the Lord our Righteousness restoring the fortunes and riches of God’s people in fulfillment and realization of every promise God ever made! Jeremiah prophesies the arrival of “a righteous branch” (a messianic title – Zechariah 3:8).**

This year many people on the East Coast have lost close to everything with Superstorm Sandy! In the Middle East bombs have just recently criss-crossed Israel and Gaza as a reminder to the rest of the world of the madness that results when two groups hate each other at the guts level. Many countries are experiencing sluggish and slow moving economies keeping many hardworking people trapped beneath loads of debt and without the means to access and obtain life’s necessities!

Then there’s the Mayan Apocalypse of December 21, 2012!<sup>1</sup>

**But here—The Prophet Jeremiah speaks of hope!**

A branch, full of blossoms and eventually fruit—is bursting out from an arid and broken nation.

✓ Life overflows in the midst of uncertainties.

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<sup>1</sup> The **2012 phenomenon** comprises a range of eschatological beliefs according to which cataclysmic or transformative events will occur on December 21, 2012. This date is regarded as the end-date of a 5,125-year-long cycle in the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar. Various astronomical alignments and numerological formula have been proposed as pertaining to this date, though none have been accepted by mainstream scholarship.

- ✓ Life emerges and flows out quietly like the fig tree's growth and we can open our eyes to the deep-down hopefulness of life or live in despair and hopelessness!

## **With God—there is a future for all of us!**

### **Luke 21:25-36 (NIV 2011)**

<sup>25</sup> “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>29</sup> He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

<sup>32</sup> “Truly I tell you; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. <sup>34</sup> “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

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## **In Advent we have a three-pronged emphasis:**

1. We look back to Christ's first coming (Christmas)!
2. We look around at Christ's presence by his Spirit among us!
3. And we look around to Christ's return—the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming!

Jesus keeps teaching that his Kingdom was far different than the earthly kingdoms of this world.

- ✓ We cannot ignore the example of Jesus' **quieter** Gospel ministry in the New Testament!
- ✓ Neither can we forget that even after Jesus' resurrection, we don't find Jesus engaged in violent acts against the rich and powerful—but trudging and marching along beside 2 clueless travelers en route to Emmaus or appearing in locked rooms or on a quiet and remote mountaintop just before disappearing into the clouds!

**Jesus says that when all these big things happen—the end is near—the Kingdom of God is near!**

**But until then**—things will probably continue on along the Kingdom trajectory and course suggested by the bulk and greater part of Jesus' ministry on earth!

- ✓ We are to continue to witness to Christ and to Christ's Kingdom in Christ-like ways!
- ✓ We are to keep our eye out for the downtrodden, and broken, and exploited around us!
- ✓ And as we do—we are to continue to work largely in obscurity and anonymity—even as Jesus did!
- ✓ God's Kingdom is going to make all the difference in the world!
- ✓ God's Kingdom will be a glorious return of Creation to what God intended in the Beginning!
- ✓ So in the meanwhile—faithfulness is called for and “Gospel success” is defined by all those times we notice the little people, the down-and-outers, the sick, and the marginalized—and proclaim to them the Good News!

- ✓ God's Kingdom Vision sees things differently!

### **So too there will be signs and wonders!**

- ✓ Jesus says to be on guard; don't get weighed down with parochial and narrow-minded anxieties.
- ✓ Be on guard against that fatal absorption with ourselves!
- ✓ Take care and be alert!
- ✓ Stand up and raise your heads because the Kingdom is coming!

### **Jesus' words here are meant to raise our heads and raise our hopes!**

- ✓ Can justice really come to the earth?
- ✓ Could Arabs and Israelis look into each other's eyes and see a sister or a brother?
- ✓ Could some of us who struggle with addictions or with diseases that trap us — could we be liberated by God—and start to walk tall in the Kingdom of God?
- ✓ Could Jesus Christ appear among us in some way that our poverty-stricken minds can never imagine in a scenario or situation that would simply erase our smug confidence about where the lines of reality are drawn?

**If we believe in the Kingdom of God—we will pray and we will hope for those things. And one more thing—one more tough thing—we will work in the same direction as we hope!**

### **Doing the Word**

So on this First Sunday of Advent, what is the Word of God for us?

1. **FIRST: Jesus fulfills the ancient prophesy.**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 5:30; 8:22; 13:4-13; 17:12; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31

- ✓ Everything that was said in the Old Testament and New Testament has come REAL and ALIVE in Jesus!
  - ✓ God came and lived with us in Jesus!
  - ✓ So we are to carry out Jesus' love to others and to the world! Jesus wants us to carry out, live out, and share his mission of aloha!
2. **SECOND: God will intervene—the Day of the Lord—for the salvation of God's people.<sup>3</sup> God appears God's-self in human flesh in Jesus!**
- ✓ We are Jesus to our families and to our neighborhoods in quiet ways!
  - ✓ It's what we do more than what we say!
  - ✓ It's also what we do together!
3. **THIRD: Jesus' return marks the redemption (*salvation, deliverance, emancipation, release*) of the faithful and the reward of those who have faithfully waited Jesus coming again!**

**God is coming among us to make the world whole!**

- ✓ Let's be HOPE to others around us; including our families!
- ✓ Let us at TFCCCH be HOPE to others in our neighborhoods here—but also in your own neighborhoods where you live!
- ✓ Let's continue to visit our seniors at their homes, at the care homes and at the hospitals!
- ✓ Let us be the Christ to each other and those whom God brings to us and around us!

**Sent in the Word**

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 13:4-13; Joel 2:28-32

And so in the Season of Advent—while joy at the Nativity of Jesus rightly fills our hearts as we anticipate and expect Christmas 2012. As Advent begins—our readings from the Bible invite us again to refocus our vision on the profound significance of Jesus' promised return to be the most significant occasion the world—and we ourselves—will ever know!

### **Story: Six-year-old raises \$1,300 for Hurricane Sandy relief**

Written by Emily Mullins - November 28, 2012



Luke Shaull with his donation box

**Six-year-old Luke Shaull** was so affected by images of Hurricane Sandy's devastation that all he could do was bury his face in a couch pillow and cry. But once his tears subsided, Luke's grief transformed into motivation and the first-grader decided to take action. With a shoebox, some art supplies, and the generosity of family, neighbors and his congregation, the young member of **St. John's United Church of Christ in Red Lion, Pa.**, has raised nearly \$1,300 for Hurricane Sandy relief efforts. "The whole driving force was completely him," said Lee Shaull, the church's music director, of his son's idea. "He is so genuine and has such a heart of gold. He just wants everyone to be happy." Luke was initially inspired by the Hurricane Sandy telethon, which aired Nov. 2 on NBC. By the time he went to bed that night, he had a shoebox decorated and ready to go, with a hole cut out of the lid for the money to go into. He asked his grandparents for donations the next day, and told his dad that he would like to take the box to church on Sunday. After a conversation with the church pastor and the mission and outreach



committee chair, it was decided that Luke's idea was a perfect way for **St. John's UCC** to get involved in the storm's relief efforts. After a few words from Luke about the goal of his project, where he told everyone how he "cried and cried," congregation members were teary eyed and ready to contribute. Some people wrote checks. One woman had Luke take the lid off of his shoebox so she could empty every last coin from her wallet into it. Those who were unprepared asked Luke to bring his donation box back the following week so they could be sure to donate then. "After service, Luke stood in the lobby with his box and people just poured out money," Lee said. "It was unbelievable how people responded." Luke left that Sunday's service with \$717. He has since collected \$568 more – nearly \$1,300 in just a few short weeks. Neighbors and friends outside of the church have also contributed as word of Luke's efforts spreads around the area, and Lee said the family will continue to take donations and forward them to those in need as long as they continue to come in. "There is so much need in the New York and New Jersey areas," he said. "It would be foolish to turn [donations] away if folks want to give."

Lee credits Luke's drive to his outgoing and active personality. And even though Luke was the inspiration behind all of this generosity, Lee says his son just wants to say "thank you" to everyone who has helped and to those who continue to help. "He is a little firecracker," Lee said. "He is a special little boy to us!"

**IT'S ALWAYS WHAT WE DO—EVEN THE SMALL AND YOUNG  
—AMONG US AS WELL AS EVERYONE—WITH GOD'S LOVE  
AND HOPE!**

**WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR JESUS IN ADVENT 2012? AND  
WHAT WILL JESUS DO FOR YOU IN ADVENT 2012? \*-\***