

Making Room *Jeremiah 33:14-16 & Luke 21:25-36*

The Hustle and Bustle of Year-End

Though Christmas is still a few weeks away, the streets and shopping centers are already alive with the holiday spirit. When you think of Christmas, what images come to mind? Maybe it's twinkling lights on a tree, joyful carols, glittering decorations, sweet treats, or tables overflowing with food. Christmas is often a season of abundance.

But with that abundance comes something else—busyness.

Recently, I came across the English phrase *hustle and bustle*. It perfectly describes the Christmas season: decorating trees, shopping for gifts, planning meals, and hosting gatherings. Life feels hectic. And in the middle of this excitement, we often lose space for stillness in our hearts. Amid the abundance and activity, we risk overlooking the true meaning of Christmas. Today's scripture readings are a wake-up call, reminding us to slow down, reflect, and refocus as we enter this Advent season.

Thinking About the End and Beginning Anew

Advent begins with the theme of hope, but today's scripture might not feel hopeful at first. Instead of joyful angels or visiting Magi, the passage from Luke warns of the end times:

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations... People will faint from fear and foreboding."

It's a sobering prophecy. But look closer. Even in this message of the end times, Jesus offers hope:

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Jesus tells us that while the end will come, it will also mark the day of redemption. Recognizing that life is finite helps us focus on what truly matters. Thinking about the end often gives clarity for how to live now.

There's a book, *One Month to Live*, where a pastor challenges people to imagine they had just 30 days left to live. During a church staff retreat, he asked the staff, "If you knew you had one month to live, how would you live differently?" The results were profound. Most participants found a clearer sense of purpose and discovered what truly mattered to them. Some pursued long-delayed dreams, like taking a trip they had always wanted. Others took their health more seriously, starting diets or exercise regimens. For the author, driving his children to school each morning became a source of genuine joy. What once seemed mundane or even bothersome became precious moments of connection and love.

If you knew your time was limited, how would you live? Who would you choose to spend your time with? Acknowledging the end doesn't diminish life—it enriches it. By recognizing that our days are a gift, we can shift our focus to what truly matters. We often find a deeper sense of gratitude for the present moment. It's this awareness that allows us to embrace life more fully, cherishing each day and living with greater purpose and intentionality.

Christ Will Come Again

Moreover, this eschatological faith—the belief in Christ's return—gives us direction in life. Let me ask you: If you knew something about the future, would it affect how you live today? If you somehow had next week's winning Powerball numbers, would that knowledge

change your life? Of course, as faithful Methodists who avoid gambling, I'm sure it wouldn't influence you much! But let's be honest—it might change things just a little.

We don't even know what will happen five minutes from now. But there is one future event we do know: Christ will come again. Can I get 'Aman?' And if we live with that eschatological hope, it will change our lives—or at least it should.

Last Tuesday morning, a pastor and his wife from New Hampshire texted me: "Can we stop by for coffee around lunchtime?" I replied, "Of course!"—and then Juhee and I started cleaning. Knowing that guests were coming, we tidied up, and prepared our home to a welcoming space.

In the same way, we know that Christ will come again, even though the exact timing is unknown. So we prepare. Believing in Christ's return should shape the direction of our lives. Eschatological hope helps us focus not on immediate realities or worldly concerns but on the coming kingdom of God where Christ reigns. It also gives us hope when there's nothing left to hope for and courage to lift our heads amidst despair.

The words from Jeremiah that we read today offer a stark contrast to Luke's prophecy, sounding much more hopeful:

"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."

How beautiful is that? Yet this promise was given to Israel in the midst of despair—after Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon and its people taken into exile. In such a hopeless situation, God gave this promise. Some despaired, but others clung to hope and believed. Living with eschatological hope means refusing to despair, trusting in God's promises, and standing tall to live out the life we're given. It's about doing our best in the place where God has placed us, no matter how insignificant our efforts might seem. Don't be discouraged if the work you do feels insignificant or small. What God desires from us is not grand achievements but our genuine, wholehearted effort.

In downtown Atlanta, there's a road called Abernathy Road, named after Ralph Abernathy, one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s closest companions. Abernathy was with Dr. King at the moment of his assassination. While many of Dr. King's other colleagues, like Jesse Jackson and Andrew Young, went on to achieve great prominence—becoming U.N. ambassadors, mayors, or even presidential candidates—Abernathy's life wasn't marked by the same level of public recognition.

But he lived his life to the fullest in the role he was given. On his tombstone, there is a simple yet profound inscription: "*I Tried.*" That was the message he wanted to offer before God and the legacy he wished to leave his family: "I tried."

That is all that matters. We don't need to feel disheartened if we think our contributions are too small. God doesn't measure us by the size of our accomplishments but by the sincerity of our hearts. When we offer our best effort, with a genuine desire to bring joy and glory to God, God takes delight in that offering—no matter how small it may seem.

So let us live with hope, trust in God's promises, and do our best where we are. And when the time comes to stand before our Creator, may we, too, be able to say with a humble and sincere heart, "*I tried.*"

Make Room for Christ

Though not mentioned by name in the Bible, an innkeeper played a pivotal role in Jesus' birth. During the busy season of the census decree from Caesar Augustus, the innkeeper likely faced the chaos of a crowded town, with every space filled. Yet amid the busyness, the innkeeper made space for Mary, a pregnant woman—perhaps out of compassion—and cleared a small corner in the stable. That humble space became a holy place where the King of Hope was born. Amid the hustle and bustle of our own lives, let us also make room for Christ. Sometimes this means letting go of the things that clutter our hearts and minds. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, believers observe a Nativity Fast during Advent, practicing prayer, self-discipline, and restraint to prepare for Christ's coming. This Advent, I invite you to set aside a moment each morning—even if it's brief—to pray sincerely, "Lord, come into my life today."

And as Christ taught us, "*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,*" share your time and space with those who lack warmth or abundance this season. A simple meal, a card, a phone call, or a kind word can transform your heart into a house of hope. May the King of Hope dwell in your hearts and lives this season.