

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 11.29.15 Advent 1c*

Day One: Jeremiah 33:14-16

"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. In those days Judah will be saved..."

I had ordered a gift to be delivered and it didn't come when I expected. Every day I watched for the delivery truck, becoming more and more concerned. Would it come in time for me to give it?

We wait for more than just packages. We wait for healing. We wait for a loved one to return home. We wait for a job, or we wait to graduate or to be married. We wait for our government, or our society to improve. We wait for promises to be fulfilled.

Sometimes it is only a matter of days, but for the really important things we may wait for a period of months, and even years.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made..."

Can you understand what a relief those words would be to Jeremiah? Called to preach against his own nation, he had been disappointed again and again in the country's political leadership. Always there was hope that with the *next* king things would be different... but they never were. (Sounding familiar?)

But God says, I will keep my promise. In the short term, 70 years, he brought them back from exile. In the longer term, 700 years, he brought the promised Savior. A new king would come not like the other kings. He would rule forever. And he would be called "The Lord Our Righteousness."

How can you find comfort in these same promises? What promise of God are you waiting for – what future gift? He kept his promises long ago, even when they required centuries. He will keep his promise to you as well.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you kept your promise. You sent a king, not only for Israel but for your New Israel. Lord, give me joy as I serve my Savior and Lord, Jesus the King. Amen.

Day Two: 1 Thess. 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

What do you suppose would make a pastor really happy? (Seriously – stop and think about that... OK, now start reading again.) If you thought about new cars, vacations, more money, or similar things, then you don't know your pastor very well.

Oh, I won't deny it. Pastors like nice things too. But what makes a person *really* happy?

Think of what makes a mother or father happy. Any gift that you spend money on is something that will soon wear out. But when a child willingly obeys, when he joyfully works with mom, when she happily accompanies dad, those are the things that bring real joy to a parent's heart.

So the Apostle Paul, a pastor to the believers in Thessalonica, is not joyful because he got a raise in pay or a larger office. He is filled

with joy because of the congregation's partnership in the gospel – because of their desire to keep growing in faith – because of their continuing in faith.

What makes Paul so happy is the chance to come back to Thessalonica and keep teaching them, and see them grow in faith, and watch them put their faith into practice.

Now... what do you think is "lacking" in our faith at St. Paul? Where can we serve more faithfully, grow into greater maturity, and live more closely with Jesus?

Your pastors long to teach, to talk, to share in the struggle with you, to walk through the difficult times with you, to search God's word with you. And in all those things, that is where we will truly find joy together, because we will share in the gifts of God that we have been given for one another.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you called pastors and teachers and others to lead us. Give them wisdom and faithfulness, and give me a willing heart to listen, to learn, and to follow. Amen.

Day Three

Gospel Lesson: Luke 21:25-36

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. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world...

If the ground suddenly began to shake, and the air to reverberate with thunderous sounds, and a cloud of dust to billow outward as a large building collapsed, how would you react? What might you think was happening? You might very well run away in fear! Is it a meteor? Is it a terrorist attack? Is it a gas main explosion?!

On the other hand, if you had watched the men placing the charges to demolish a building, and you had read the signs placed around it to warn the public, then instead of running away in fear you might crowd as close as possible in curiosity to get the best view. You might even be among those who would record the event to tell others about it on YouTube.

Knowing ahead of time makes all the difference. In fact, knowing ahead of time

changes a fearful thing into a fascinating thing.

Now look at all the bad things happening in the world. How should you react to them, knowing what Jesus has said?

Terrorists attack and kill innocent people. Criminals commit cruel acts. There are predators who threaten your children. People are still sold into slavery. A terrible accident claims many lives. All of these are evil things, even more destructive than the dynamite that reduces a great building to rubble. But when the world explodes, we do not need to fear or to hide, because we are not surprised.

“These are the birth pains” Jesus said. And although this world is very dark, Jesus is bringing the fulfillment of all God’s promises. “Thy kingdom come,” we pray. So when we see God’s kingdom coming, we should lift up our heads, and trust in him.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I am sad to see terrible things happen, but I am also excited to know that your great day comes closer and closer. Take away my fears and fill me with energy to proclaim your coming. Amen.*

Day Four: “Hark the Glad Sound” (LSB 349)

Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes, the Savior promised long; let every heart prepare a throne and every voice a song.

The Advent season begins next Sunday, a season of preparation. During the 4 weeks of Advent we are not just getting ready for Christmas, Jesus’ first coming. We are reminded to prepare for Jesus 2nd coming as well.

Many of our Advent songs will talk about anticipation, waiting, joy and preparation. In this hymn we are urged to make a throne ready in our hearts for Jesus. And of course, many of us will “deck the halls” of our homes with boughs of holly and lots of lights. We choose decorations for our homes to remind us of preparing our hearts, using the time God has given us to display his love in our lives.

One of the decorations that most of our homes will have is a crèche, or nativity scene. It may be fine porcelain or just cast resin. It could be carved of wood or molded in plastic. But in every case it will include small figures of Mary and Joseph with the baby

Jesus. It will probably include the shepherds and some sheep, perhaps the innkeeper and his wife, often some other animals, a cow or a donkey. Larger sets will even include villagers, a girl carrying water, a boy with a drum.

Most of these figures are not mentioned in the Bible, but nevertheless they remind us that we too have a place in Jesus’ stable.

Look well at your nativity scene this year. Consider how each piece has something to teach us about God, and how he keeps his promises. As you prepare a place for your nativity, take time in prayer to prepare a place for Jesus in your life, in your family, in your home this Advent.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, let me see in earthly decoration the joy that comes with your heavenly fulfillment. Let me, by your Spirit, make a place for you today. Amen.

<p>These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org</p>
