

Lectionary C Advent 1 November 29, 2015
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25:1-10
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36

Hope in the Muck

When I was a young girl, I never much cared for spring. When everyone talked about how much they loved spring, my first thoughts were, “Ooo, yuck, why?”

Spring was a little different where I grew up, north of here. As far as I was concerned all spring meant was mud and slush and cold damp days. Going outside was almost dangerous.

Dangerous, that is for my boots. They would invariably get stuck in the mud and if I wasn't careful, I would completely lose a boot, or both, to the thick gunky mire. It would grab my boots like a big gooey flytrap and pull them right off my feet. And then I was in a predicament. That slimy mud was not warm. There I was with freezing feet in the middle of a black hole of mud with no way to out, but to trudge out, pulling with all my might, one step at a time, like I had suction cups attached to my feet. All along, I realized full-well my socks would be the sacrificial victims of my escape.

This probably only happened once or twice, then I learned to secure my boots tight to my feet, but that memory stayed with me as the symbol of the season spring. I didn't like it one bit.

That mud got in my way of noticing the new buds on trees like Jesus was talking about in our reading from Luke. *"Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near."* I really didn't see any benefit whatsoever to that “in between” time called spring.

Why couldn't we skip it all together and jump from winter, with the snow that was pretty and fun to play in and the frozen ground that didn't suck your feet down into the ground. And go right to summer, when it was hot enough I could go swimming and playing in that warm mud might have even been fun? I wasn't against getting dirty, it was being freezing cold, and sucked in a quagmire that I didn't like.

If I could have just known Jesus' parable about trees in the spring, maybe I would have seen something besides freezing sludge and boot sucking mud. Jesus is telling us what spring is about, hope in the muck. Because we know God's promise, we can look for the sprigs of green in the muddy pits life hands out. Jesus says, *"Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* And he goes on, *"So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."*

Did you hear that? Stop looking down at your muddy feet. Look up to the tree tops. Those buds say there is hope in the muck. And God is in the middle of it all.

This first Sunday in Advent is about hope and it is about being realistic, that's why the scripture hits us in the face with the fact that everything we are used to is not going to last forever. So it

says we are to stop holding on to our boots because they are going to be sucked away, that's a fact. The only thing that will not wear out are Jesus' words, Jesus' promises—and Jesus promises that hope is alive in the muck of this world.

These words from Luke aren't about predicting when the world will come to an end. It is more about how we are to live from now until it happens.

According to one commentator, *“we live and work, love and struggle between the two great poles of God's intervention in the world: the coming of Christ in the flesh in order to triumph over death through his cross and resurrection...—and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time and his triumph over all the powers of earth and heaven. This “in-between time,” though fraught with tension, (and muddy patches,) is nevertheless also characterized by hope and courage because we know that the end of this story, while not yet here, has been written by the resurrected Christ.”* (David Lose)

Listen to Jesus, *“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap.”* Jesus is telling us to not get stuck in the mud. There are two ways this can happen—through indulging ourselves in stuff that won't last, material things, that try to take God's place, or worrying about things in life that we can't do anything about. Instead Jesus urges us to look up past all that muck to see sprigs of God's presence with us now. When we look up we see hope and we can be beacons shining that hope for others to see.

We are living in a time right now when people are afraid to travel, or go out of their homes for that matter because of terrorists. Many are afraid to admit into our country those seeking a safe home for fear they may be terrorists. But Jesus is telling us that because we see know God is with us and it is a direct command from God that we care for the homeless, we are called to remind each other to stand up and raise our heads. We can give safety to others because our safety is secure in Jesus (who by the way was a refugee as a child,)

When the violence of our city streets push us to abandon civil rights and protections for all people regardless of their race or ethnicity, we can remind each other to stand up and raise our heads, for our redemption has already drawn near in Jesus.

You know fear is our real enemy here, not terrorists or violence or hatred. Fear can make us crazy. That is what Gandhi said. It is the mud that gets us stuck in dark places that blind us from Jesus' truth. Fear causes us to hang onto stuff that won't last. Fear causes us flounder in the mud. We get stuck.

Here's what Jesus says according to the Message Bible, *“So, whatever you do, don't go to sleep at the switch. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that's coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man.”*

How do we escape all this fear? We look up and we pray. We stick close to God and courageously tackle that muck, getting in the middle of it with God in order to help God's children who need love. This is the hope that makes God's children different. It is the hope that we hear all through the Bible, *“Do not fear.”* And, Boy, do we need this hope today, when so much of life is bogged down by fear and the lies that try to make us think we are doomed.

I can't help but think of the Psalm that says, "*I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD...*" That is pretty much what Jesus is telling us here, isn't it?

That is Jesus' message to us this first Sunday in Advent. Look up. Hope is God's gift to us in the mud puddles of life. It pulls us up by the boot straps and gives us a new perspective. Look! New life is sprouting. Amen.