

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
First Sunday of Advent  
Sunday, 2 December 2018  
“Hope”

“Waiting for the Beginning, and the End”  
First in a sermon series entitled “The Waiting Room”

Hebrew Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16  
Christian Scripture: Luke 21:25-36



I have been longing for this day. The first day, the first Sunday, in Advent.



It is the first day of the Christian year, in the first year of what I envision to be my forty-three year ministry at Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C. (That means I plan to retire just shy of my ninetieth birthday!) I have been waiting for this day because I know how during Advent and Christmas the church becomes more iconic than at any other time - all decked-out in its greenery and decorations.



I know the melodious sounds of the Messiah Sing, the hustle and bustle of the Christmas fair and bazaar, and the smells of food and pine give the church an air of nostalgia and cheer.

Last week during the Council meeting after expressing my sense of anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed with the activities of this church, many of you sympathetically shared with me that other ministers have also felt the same during this time of the year. I was reassured that my sense of apprehension and subsequent exhaustion is quite normal. The seasons of Christmas and Advent at Centre Congregational Church are active as we anticipate and celebrate the coming of the Christ child. We are as we should be: busily waiting! We are now in the ecclesiastic 'Waiting Room', as it were.



Yet, I think it is important to point-out that in this 'waiting room', we are not sitting quiet, twiddling our thumbs, silently drinking coffee, watching the

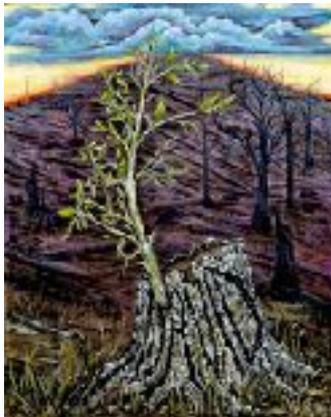
clock, pacing uselessly up and down the floor. I remember the months, days, hours and minutes before my son was born, we were all filled with active anticipation. A crib had to be purchased, bottles readied, the home prepared, clothes folded-up at the ready, car seat installed, and even the college fund (now coming in handy) was already prepared before we heard the first cry! I was an active participant with my wife preparing our bodies (me only in solidarity). With her, I began eating extra healthy, abstained from alcohol. I stopped smoking cannabis (I'm just kidding. I never smoked cannabis). I exercised regularly. My gosh, I recall even purchasing meditative Mozart music for the womb. Micah heard soft, soothing classical music via earphone *en utero*! What I am trying to say is that waiting is active, it is about being engaged; it is about being positive; it is about being in solidarity with one another; it is about sharing the joys, anxieties and responsibilities of anticipation together. Our 'waiting room' is not is not passive. It is not full of dread. It is not helpless agonizing fear of the unknown.



So, here we sit in the 'waiting room' of Centre Congregational Church. Together. In partnership. Excited. Busy. Hopeful. Eager. Yes, and a bit tired. As we prepare in the waiting room, that is the sanctuary, that is the ministries of this beautiful church, for what are we waiting?



The answer from our scriptures is quite clear! It is the kingdom of God! The kingdom of God is coming! We are waiting for an age, a realm, an existence where God will restore the earth; God will bring people together; God will establish justice; God will reconcile humans to God and with one another; God will turn selfishness into selflessness; God will turn insults into affirmations; God will heal wounds; God will establish peace and goodwill. God will establish God's will on Earth, just as it is in heaven.



Friends, our scripture readings this morning may seem perplexing. What's this about the Messiah of God (who will inaugurate the kingdom), from 'a branch'? Our scripture reading from the prophet Jeremiah speaks of a coming Messiah, a king, a political theocratic monarch. This king will be so in tune with God that God will rule the Earth through him.



This Messiah, this chosen one of God, will establish justice and his being in tune with God will enable the inhabitants of the earth to also be in tune with God. As people who live in 2018, we must not be perplexed with a literal interpretation of how people of faith envisioned that which they anticipated 2,600 years ago (600 BCE) during the prophet Jeremiah's age.



Nor must we be upset or perplexed about how people of faith 1,900 years ago (80 AD, during the time when the evangelist Luke wrote his gospel) envisioned the coming of God's kingdom. Do not be worried about how the author of Luke envisioned how the kingdom of God will be inaugurated, through a Second Coming of the Messiah. Do not be concerned that the Second Coming is described much differently than the First Coming. And do not be concerned that we here at Centre Congregational Church envision the kingdom of God in a way very different than

Jeremiah and Luke did. The differences reflect different times, and places, different fears, different hopes and dreams.



How do we envision the Kingdom of God coming? Just have a meal at Loaves and Fishes on Tuesdays and Fridays. How do we envision the Kingdom of God coming?



Just watch the fathers and mothers who trust their children's lives to the Brattleboro Centre for Children as they deliver them to this church. See the space where AA meetings occur and where those who come here for solidarity and support meet. Sit in a Council meeting, as a dozen leaders gather and discuss enthusiastically, despite being weary and worn. We need only see the inauguration of the kingdom of God here, at Centre Congregational Church, as we speak prophetically with members of our community, as we welcome those who are excluded from other churches because of who they are, as we love and care for one another in homes and hospitals. This is our Waiting Room! In this sanctuary! In this church! This is our Waiting Room!

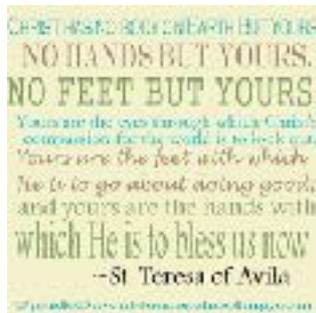


For what are we waiting? Well, we are waiting for the first coming of the Messiah as spoken of by Jeremiah. The Christ child, Jesus. Jesus is the one we understand to be most in tune with the word and will of God. Through Jesus we hear, see, feel and understand the words, the face, the love and the wisdom of God like we never have before or since! His ministry inaugurated the Kingdom of God on Earth, then and there, 2,000 years ago in Palestine. With Jesus, we await the beginning of the establishment of kingdom of God.

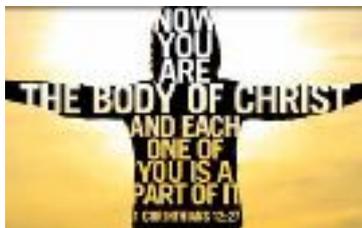


Our scripture reading from Luke tells we are also waiting for something else. We are also waiting for the Second Coming. The Second Coming is when the Messiah shall come again and that which began 2,000 years ago will be fulfilled and completed. No one knows how or why or when this will occur. Hence, there are so many different envisionings of how and when the Second Coming will burst on our scene in the Bible and throughout history. But we need not concern ourselves so much about how others have envisioned this Second Coming, this establishment of the Kingdom of God. I say this because they all have this in common: the world is

not right; this we know. The Messiah came to show us the way; the Messiah will partner with us to continue and to complete that which was begun.



Friends in Christ, dare I repeat the sentiments of Father Richard Rohr: *you and I* are the Second Coming of Christ. *You and I* are the hands, the feet, the mouth, the heart, the love, the peace, the joy of the Father and the Son here and now in this waiting room. Christ *has come*, Christ *is here*, Christ *will come again!* I see evidence of Jesus' ministry 2,000 years ago in all of you.



I see Christ is alive and active through this church and the ministries it reaches around the world. I anticipate great and wonderful things from this place in the future. We, the followers of God, envision the same reality that Jeremiah and Luke did, but we do so differently. Jeremiah saw the first coming of a king. Luke a second coming of a cosmic restorer. We, well, perhaps we see don't see the same things, but we see the Second Coming in one another. I see Christ when I see, touch, hear and love each of you.



So, this Advent, we await the past birth of Jesus. We await the Second Coming that is already here in each of your lives. And we await the fulfilment of the kingdom of God in the future. We await both the beginning, and the end. We await the Alpha and the Omega.

May we busily anticipate, prepare for and foster that which we enjoyed, experience and await.

This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, the people of God responded, "Amen!"