

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
Advent 1
November 29, 2015
Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36

Linda and I spent the Thanksgiving holiday in Tuscaloosa with our youngest son Jake, and our oldest son Michael and his wife, Megan. Michael and Megan moved to Tuscaloosa over the summer, when Michael took a job as a professor at the University of Alabama. We spent Tuesday on campus. We actually took a tour of the football stadium just to say we did it. (We did not drink any crimson kool aid.) More importantly, we saw the steps where the governor of Alabama stood on June 11, 1963 in an unsuccessful attempt to block the enrollment at the university of two African American students, Vivian Malone and James Hood. This was one of the iconic moments of the civil rights struggle in America. It was strange to remember actually watching that event on television as it took place over 50 years ago.

We had a great time with Michael and Megan at their home. We did some gardening, built a fire pit, played some cards and enjoyed our Thanksgiving dinner. It was especially wonderful to be there to celebrate their official announcement that they are expecting a baby. Linda and I have known for a few weeks now, but they only let their grandparents know last weekend. With the pregnancy officially announced, we had a great opportunity to share a few joy filled expectant days. Linda even toured the hospital where the baby will be born.

Another highlight for me was having the time to finish a book I was reading: “Being Mortal” by Atula Gawande. The book is subtitled, *Medicine and What Matters in the End*. Gawande writes about the challenges of facing our mortality at this time in history. He writes about people who show us how to have the hard conversations and how to ensure we never sacrifice what people really care about.

The news that we are going to be grandparents, and the book “Being Mortal” both confront me with the unmistakable truth that I am getting older. Even in our age when “60 may be the new 40” and even if I intend to live to be 100, becoming a grandparent is not a sign of one’s approaching youth. And while “Being Mortal” does describe some people who face death at an older age than mine, many of the people written about were not all that much older than I. Approaching grandparenthood, and reading books about the end of life were reminders to me that I probably have more days and years behind me than in front of me. It’s the truth. Amen.

That all being said, it is good to be here with you to celebrate the beginning of Advent. The focus of the first Sunday of Advent is not on the days or years that are behind us, but on those that are before us. The readings do not look backward but forward, not at what has been but what will be. Jeremiah writes about the days that are surely to come: Days when a righteous king will rule over a righteous land and a righteous city. In what is his earliest letter, Paul writes about the joy he feels for the saints of Thessalonika, as he waits for the coming of the Lord Jesus with all the saints. We begin our year of reading from Luke’s Gospel, not with a story about the birth of Jesus, but a teaching of Jesus when he speaks of days to come, when redemption is drawing near.

The images of from Scripture are not meant to frighten us, they are not meant to scare the hell out of us, but to inspire us to hope. As disciples of Jesus, Advent gives us a peak at what is to come, and what is to come is the kingdom of God. What is to come is righteousness, what is to come is the great and glorious coming of Jesus.

Day after day after day. Week after week after week. The news is always bad, and seems to be getting worse. More refugees, more terrorism, more images of senseless murder, more pictures of children shot in our streets, more war, more disease, more aches, more pains, more crisis in our families and communities, more environmental warnings. We wonder at times, I wonder at times, how can next week possibly be more frightening than this week? We are tempted, I am tempted, to hang my head in hopeless despair. Advent comes and invites us to lift our heads in hope. To lift our heads in joy before Jesus as he comes.

Our collect this morning invites us in the time of this mortal life to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Perhaps some of us have already put some lights on our tree or windows or on our porches. What lights can you put on your life? Can you put on lights of kindness, or patience, or mercy? Can you buy a gift for someone who does not deserve it or leave a gift for someone who cannot pay you back? Can you send a card to someone who is lonely? Can you reach out in some ways to the poor, to the hungry, to prisoners or to refugees? What can you do this week that seeks to lift the burden of despair; that relieves suffering; that overcomes racism, or stewards the environment? What can you do this week that helps bring to birth the kingdom of God on earth?

Linda and I had quite week celebrating Thanksgiving in in Tuscaloosa with family. I read a book on mortality. We pondered the mystery of new life being born, we planted a garden, and we walked on a campus where over 50 years ago righteousness won a victory. It was a wonderful week to look back and say thanks. It was a wonderful week to look forward to what is to come and rejoice. I hope you had a happy and blessed Thanksgiving. I hope you will have a blessed and hopeful Advent.