

# Trinity United Methodist Church

## "Thoughts For Troubled Times"

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First Sunday of Advent

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### Jeremiah 33:1-16



It's the first Sunday of Advent and, I must admit, it kind of snuck up on me! Not the date, but in the midst of all the craziness, stress, conflicting advice and demands, preparation for the coming of the Christ Child was not the first thing on my mind. Yet here it is; this Sunday we'll have a tree up in the church, we'll light a candle each week as we progress through the story, and sing the songs of Christmas. Meanwhile I'll worry about how to do a candlelight service, be stunned as I see the new prices for everything as the wife and I consider gifts for the great grandkids and start to think about what decorating the house actually involves. Christmas is like that; more especially, the birth of the Christ Child is like that. It sort of sneaks up on you, without fanfare, trumpets or parades, even in the darkest times. For me, it's a time to pause, however briefly and think back, to when the children were young, to my own childhood. In my home, I was the official decorator. My mom would cook the special Christmas dishes and do the Christmas cards, my dad would take me along and we'd pick out a tree, but the decorating task was mine. The rest of the house, doorways and windowsills, centerpieces and so on would get done the week ahead, but the tree itself was always kept as a Christmas Eve project. It could get quite involved with different themes and colored lights from year to year, the old, some very old glass ornaments, and the occasional natural touch, pine cones and so on as it occurred to me. It was a special time, a time of warmth and caring and good cheer. Tree decorating itself always was interrupted by church services, the 7:00 play (which my mother, a Sunday School teacher, always volunteered me for), and the 11:00 candlelight service. And then, back home to finish the decorating. We weren't rich, we lived in an apartment, gifts were neither plentiful nor opulent, but the season was a warm spot aglow with love no matter how dark the times. As I grew older, married Alice, became a family of 5 boys and a girl, we both sought to create the same environment, not always easy: picture boys standing across the room and lobbing ornaments onto the tree, or making salt dough ornaments and having the dog eat them all. But we tried. Alice and our daughter cooking, the boys and I going into the woods and cutting a tree, and all of us decorating, still in the context of the Christmas Eve services. We weren't wealthy, I was making \$15,000 a year at the time, but it was a warm and safe time in a world (the late 70's) which had its ration of craziness, when I was questioning the direction of my life, as I was considering going back on active duty with the Army.

All this came flooding back as I talked to people this week wrestling with an uncertain economy, with illness or loss, pastors wondering what all of this meant for the future of the church, and as I read today's selection from Jeremiah. The Holy City a pile of rubble, the sacred temple destroyed and its treasures looted; the people enslaved and on their way to a foreign land and an uncertain future. And Jeremiah says there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord. Hope in the midst of darkness and despair, possibility where there seems to be only defeat, the presence and assurance of a God who is not bounded by time and space, distance or politics. I needed that. I needed to reflect on a God who is all powerful, who would choose to save the world by sending his Son into the darkness as a helpless child. That is faith, that is power, that is love.

The message of Advent, it seems to me, is that it doesn't end here; that the God who loves us walks with us through the darkness and leads us into the light. Have a blessed Advent season.

Pastor Mike