

READY

The first Sunday of Advent is already here, and I'm not ready.

I told the worship committee that I would do the decor for this Sunday,..... and well..... I planned to do it Wednesday, but got side tracked,... and then Thursday, but something came up,... and I had a meeting in the city on Friday,,,,, and Friday night I was tired,.. so I couldn't do it until later Saturday because of the Lady's luncheon was here.. ... and then I had to work on my sermon, too.....

Even though I knew Sunday was coming, and I was looking forward to the start of Advent,..... I just didn't get ready in time.

Back in Jeremiah's time, a lot of people were looking forward.... and hoping for the coming Messiah.

Jeremiah was a preacher during the years of 677-586 BCE, and those were turbulent times. Assyria was falling apart and the Babylonian Empire was expanding and threatening. To make matters worse, the nation of Judah was a mess. There was corruption, inequality and discontent.

In this situation, Jeremiah boldly proclaimed that God's promised Messiah was coming soon.

In the midst of hopelessness, gloom and doom, that was like a dead tree trunk, God would cause a new "righteous" branch to spring to life.

And, this God imbued Messiah would **execute justice and righteousness**.

The characteristics of the Messiah comes as no surprise because God loves justice and righteousness. God has a passion for the weak and powerless.....who are the victims of injustice and greed.

Equality and compassionate fairness are essential to Justice, God's justice.

And, righteousness is..... simply.... being/ living the right way, God's way.

To be sure,..... Jesus the Messiah did just that. He was righteous and executed justice..... at great risk to himself.

Jeremiah's message brought hope and encouragement to the outcasts, the downtrodden and the weak..... because they needed justice and righteousness to prevail. Those in the power are not concerned about such things, and likely oppose them.

I wonder how we would respond / how we would feel if we were told Jesus is coming soon, and he would execute justice and righteousness when he comes.????

Executing justice would mean leveling the playing field.

Right now, in our system,..... money doesn't just buy stuff, money means power.

The affluent don't just get to have more toys, they are More powerful.

They set the rules....., and make sure they don't lose their powerful advantage.

And,..... I don't think we fall into the category of downtrodden and weak.  
Executing justice is essentially bringing about Jubilee,..... and truth be told,..... we don't want that.  
Our world would be turned upside down.  
Land that was taken away would be given back.  
Banks would dissolve,.... the government would fall..... things / life would be in chaos..... for a while.

Societies have a high tolerance for injustices and corruption (which is the opposite of righteousness).  
Societies have a high tolerance for injustices and corruption..... AS LONG as there is stability and predictability.

The vast majority of Canadians didn't complain at all to the abuse the demonstrators received during the G8-G20 protests in Toronto, in June of 2010. They even believed the official label given to them-- anarchists--was true.  
Only a handful of the demonstrators provoked violence. They were of no threat.  
However, thousands and thousands of people demanding change ARE threatening to those in power.

Likewise, if the president of Egypt can convince the majority that he will bring stability,..... they'll grant him all the power he wants.

Only the helpless..... and the true lovers of justice and righteousness,..... long for radical change / for the world to be turned upside down.

Moreover, the sad truth is that we actively support our current unjust and corrupt system. We invest in it in many ways.  
For example, we buy clothes made by exploited people in terrible sweat shops, such as the one that caught fire in Bangladesh where over 100 workers died.

This past week, I talked with a friend, who lives elsewhere, and he mentioned Christmas shopping at Walmart.  
I responded with surprise, and asked, "How can you support them? Do you know how they treat their employees.... and do you know how and where they get most of their merchandise?"

I told him some details about Walmart's unjust and unrighteous activities, and he confessed he knew some of them, and quickly added, "But, their stuff is cheaper. Money is tight. I can't afford to pay more."

I noted that they are not as cheap as they've convinced people they are, and I stressed to him that with his money... he was investing and condoning injustices.

In frustration, he said, "I don't have time to learn about all the companies and products I support."  
For the sake of friendship,..... the conversation went elsewhere.

However, it's not an issue of having enough time.  
It is a matter of having enough interest..... in wanting justice and righteousness .....more than a cheap product.

Righteous is the right way,..... and not necessarily the easiest or cheapest way,.....BUT.....it may be in the long run.

For example,..... not long ago..... cheap meat made people sick,... and ended up being very costly... and complicated.

Another example, the Canadian Mennonite was warned, back in July, that they better be careful what they print or they may lose their tax exempt status.

This presents a problem: boldly speak out about what we assert is the way of Christ, regarding justice and righteousness with the consequences of paying taxes..... or.... submit by screening our passions in order to save money.

I wonder which choice Mennonites across our country are advocating?

There are countless others examples of how we participate and support unjust and unrighteous actions, from financial investments to the uranium industry.

The point is: we are the comfortable, so I don't think Jeremiah was preaching to us. Still, it was a different era back then. Syria was falling apart. A new nation in the East was on the rise.

Their country's economy was struggling, they had a corrupt government and they didn't have any hockey games to watch Saturday night, either.....

So, those who were longing for justice and righteousness heard Jeremiah's predication, and waited. One year went by, then another, then a decade, then a century and then nearly 700 hundred years passed,..... before the lock out ended.

No,..... I mean before Jesus the Messiah came.

Fulfilling God's promise Jesus lived, with grace and love, Jesus lived and proclaimed justice and righteousness.

Yet, after only three years, he was prompting his followers to anticipate his return.

He told them there would be signs that foreshadow his return, and when things get ugly, the believers are to rise up and be seen!

They / WE are to be prepared--ready!

However, it's been two thousand years, and still no second coming.

Was this just one of those quackie "end of time" predictions we still regularly hear forecasted?

Such as, the Mayan calendar ends this month on the 21st, so.... that must mean that time comes to end. ???

Still, Jesus did say that "...this generation would not pass away until all things have taken place."

Was Jesus wrong? Were his words altered for the persecuted 1st century church..... or..... maybe..... we shouldn't read this with a narrow, literal view???

Maybe,.... this anticipation,... this preparing, this Being ready... is the way to live,....for that generation..... and for Our generation??

And, maybe.... there is something to "reading the signs."  
Perhaps, the signs reveal the need for the Messiah--God in the world doing justice and righteousness?  
Maybe we should heed the signs and be ready???

We read "signs"/ indicators.... all the time.

When the length of daylight shortens and the nights get cold, we prepare for winter, and this one looks like a real winter, so I hope we are all ready.  
We look for economic indicators before we make plans  
We interpret "indicators" / signs all the time,..... and .... there are consequences if we are not ready.

For example, try telling your children, "Sorry kids, I just got real busy, and forgot to buy any Christmas gifts for you this year?"

The calendar warned me that the first Sunday of Advent was coming,..... and now everybody sees.... that I wasn't ready.

To be sure, it is essential to know how to read/ how to interpret the "signs." We have to know the warnings,..... or suffer the consequences of our ignorance and indifference.

The same friend I had the conversation about Walmart, is quite knowledgeable about horses.

While ago, when I told him about being bucked off the horse, he asked me a number of questions about the "signs" / the messages the horse was giving me through her behaviour,... before I tried to ride her. After telling them to him, and he bluntly scolded me for NOT understanding the horse's signs, saying, "You didn't read the horse correctly. You should have known better."

He was right,..... and he should do his homework on where he shops, too.  
There are consequences for being ignorant / for being lazy, and for caring about the Wrong things--the unrighteous things.

Maybe there is a sign in Super storm Sandy?

Maybe Global warming is telling us we must end our addiction to cheap fossil fuels and Stop abusing the environment?

And, maybe the growing gap between rich and poor is a sign?

Or, perhaps, merchandise /products that are priced cheaper than we could afford to make them is also a sign that something is terribly wrong.

And, what other signs are we missing.....?????

What about the sign that Advent is here?

Advent..... yes Advent.... the official, church, beginning for the Christmas season..... when the church is nicely decorated.

It is Advent,..... and you're likely wondering, "Sermons in Advent are suppose to be light, uplifting....so that we can feel joy, love, hope and peace, and be made full of the Spirit of Christmas."

True,..... aside from the fact that this stuff was in the passages for today,.....feeling joy love, hope and peace, and ....the Spirit of Christmas is exactly what today's message is about.

When there is injustice: when some people are treated better than others,.. when some have more power than others, when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer,... then there is a huge problem.

And,...Everybody feels it.

When development, growth and money form the bottom line / the motivation for living..... then everybody gets poorer.

When injustices and unrighteousness prevail, then there is more tension at work.

We become more individualistic and self serving--greedy.

Towns and neighbourhoods don't feel warm and welcoming, and fewer people volunteer.

We become more fearful, and build more gated communities and ...prisons,..... and spend more on the military.

We divide into camps of us against them / of right and wrong.

And,....we tolerate more exploitation, violence and injustices.... just as long we get to keep what we have.

In other words, if we fail to read the signs of injustices and unrighteousness, then we do Not have peace and joy and hope and love.

And, I should add, there are also repercussions when we are Not being righteous to God's creation.

Traditionally, the First Sunday of Advent carries the message of hope.

There is hope,... and more than just the hope that the church will be properly decorated by next Sunday.

There is hope in the awareness of God's love for justice and righteousness. God doesn't want us to suffer in a world of inequality and corruption. God wants all, including you and me to live in peace, joy, love and trust, and to NOT be fooled by another way.

God loves the world enough to send a Messiah / God's son.... to show us the way.....and as Jesus often noted, God's kingdom is unfolding / God's way is happening.....AND....we are invited / called to be ready.

I think following Christ demands being ready.....ready for God's justice and righteousness.

We are people on the verge / we are to live each day at the brink / to expect at any moment... God's way to prevail.

In addition, I don't see any other way to understand Christmas / the celebrate Jesus' birth..... without proclaiming and preparing for Jubilee.

We are at the advent. Let us prepare and be ready for God's way of justice and righteousness..... to be fulfilled,..... in each of us.

Christmas is coming. Tomorrow is coming. Jesus is coming, Ready or Not, but it is better to be ready.