

## "The Coming of a King"

One of my early life lessons was learning to balance expectations with reality. My first memory of this was on a family vacation where I was constantly concerned about what was going to happen next. I wanted to know where we were going, what we were going to do when we got there, and how long we were going to stay before the next thing. And, of course, I wanted to know what that next thing was going to be, and so my constant need to know about the future set a pattern I'm sure was annoying to others in my family. We were sharing that vacation with family friends, and the dad of that family finally pulled me aside one day and said, "Larry, I love that you are so into what is going to happen, but I need to tell you that your constant worry and wanting to know what's coming next is causing you to miss what's happening now. Remember this as you go through life," he told me. "Be aware of the moment." This is good advice. Be aware of the moment, lest all our worry about what might happen causes us to miss the gift that is now.

Despite the fact that our Thanksgiving celebrations of this past week were probably not all we wanted them to be due to our concerns about public health, Thanksgiving Day is a reminder to take stock of the blessings we've received. Sure, we think about what's coming. We wonder about the future, not just if we will survive but that we will be OK and that those we love are going to be alright. We think about our personal safety, and about our nation, and about the world, and the weight of it all can be overwhelming. The balance to that weight is to be aware of the moment. We've been given so much. Like the scripture says, "God will fully satisfy every need...in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19) Instead of only thinking about what we don't have or what we might lose or what might happen, the hope of our life with God is trusting that we already possess every certainty to live faithfully and well in this moment. We are OK and we will be OK because we live connected to the one who was, and who is, and who will be. The season of Advent, which is now underway, positions us to trust Christ who is with us and who will come to us in the days ahead.

The poetic words of the prophet Micah speak to this truth. Micah spoke the word of God to the people at a challenging time in Hebrew history. The difficult period of the Exile had ended and the people who returned to what was left of Jerusalem and the territory of Judah were overwhelmed by the reality of the situation. Most everything was in ruins. They felt vulnerable to the threat of the strong nations that surrounded them. They wanted to rebuild but were uncertain how to do it. They lacked leadership and couldn't see a clear pathway forward. Micah acknowledged the struggle they faced but he reminded them that they belonged to God. Despite the hardship they were living through, God had not abandoned them. Though their lives and world were not as they wanted them to be, they had been given a promise that God would provide what they needed. And most of all, God would send a king, a Messiah, a servant of God who would guide them, protect them, and care for them. Like a shepherd, this one sent from God would feed the flock, and they would rest secure, and he would be the One of Peace. This is a word for the ages. It's a word for us. We should never pretend away the challenges of our present time but neither should we forget that we, too, are given a promise that one from God is given to us and he will lead us safely and in strength.

Jesus is that king. A number of folks in our congregation are participating in our Advent study on Adam Hamilton's book, Incarnation. In the opening chapter, we are reminded that in the midst of our concern about our earthly leaders, the one who ultimately leads us is Jesus the Christ. The marvelous truth about Jesus is that he isn't elected or chosen because of our preferences. Jesus is given to us by God and he becomes for us the presence of God in both the moment and in the future. Let me stand to the side so we can see our Advent altar more clearly. Note the rocks, which represent the earth, the world, and the hard realities we are facing. On these rocks are the Advent candles, the light of which will grow through this season, reminding us that nothing can cancel the light that shines in our lives through Christ. This is true now and it will be true moving forward. We trust this reality today and we will grow in that trust as we move closer to Christmas.

Jesus is our king and that means we live within his realm, what the bible refers to as the Kingdom of God. As I close, allow me to lift up two aspects for us to carry with us this week. First, Micah says the king God will send will come from little Bethlehem. At that time Bethlehem was the poorest of villages, a tiny and insignificant place. Can God call forth something wonderful from such a small beginning? This is exactly the point. I am convinced that God will open each of us to something life-giving and healing but it will come in a way we would never expect. This week it may come when you are given the opportunity to forgive someone else. Maybe you will participate in one of our many mission projects. Through the giving of grace or sharing to help someone else you will be reassured of God's goodness in the moment. It's OK to expect great things from God but let's not miss the small things from God that can make all the difference. And secondly, Micah says the king will impact the way we live. In other words, the king calls us to participate in the reality God is making possible. Jesus didn't just come so we would

know he is our king. Jesus came so we would live in his kingdom. Christ calls us to extend mercy, healing and peace. Not a day goes by but that we are given the chance to say “yes” to participate with God in sharing the work of being more loving to those around us. This impacts the moment and the future. This is for today and the days of this week. The king is coming but the king is also here, and the light of our Advent candle reflects the light God places in us.

I don’t have a strong way to end the preaching today because this is more about a beginning than an ending. With that in mind, I invite us to gather for our service of communion, so that the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup would bring the presence of Jesus to us now, and prepare us to receive him even more deeply in the days to come.