

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 29, 2015
First Sunday of Advent

The readings this week:

- Jeremiah 33:14-16 ◦ Psalm 25:1-10
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 ◦ Luke 21:25-36



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

On a Threshold

As we wait, the reality is dawning that the answers upon which we wait will determine an unknown future into which we will walk. It is a familiar feeling for we have known it while waiting for the doctor's prognosis or the lab work to return. We have stood on a threshold when we waited for the call offering or rejecting a job. We have stood on a threshold wondering if it is a boy or a girl or one of each! We have stood on a threshold wondering if a foundation will approve our proposal for a grant. And we stand on a threshold with the beginning of new calendar years, new school years, new church years...always dimly aware of a future wide open before us with very little definition but with every possibility. There seems to only be a sense that "this is right" before we step tentatively into the dark. So we stand in that threshold with anticipation and dread, excitement and fear, confidence and insecurity.

On this Sunday, I believe we are standing on the threshold of Advent waiting, Advent longing and Advent anticipation. It gives us a chance to consider for what we wait and how we will prepare ourselves for it. Our scripture points us to others who also waited on a threshold.

Jesus has been in the Temple teaching for days. The scribes and chief priests, after engaging Jesus in debate over marriage and divorce, after enduring His parables of judgment, after hearing Jesus predict the destruction of the Temple; have begun their plots to "destroy Him." (Luke 19:47) The threshold upon which they stand is full of darkness and doom. And Jesus, fully aware that He stands on an uncertain threshold, continues to teach with such passion that we recognize His personal awareness that His end is drawing nigh. Our text today picks up just after a rare moment of quiet observation. Jesus is watching as people put their money into the Temple offering, when the disciples seek some simple explanations about the meaning of His words. They ask how the end of the Temple will occur and what the signs for

its destruction will be. The answer was surely not what they expected. Then Jesus gives them these directives, "Be ready! Stay awake! Be alert! Watch at all times! Pray! Because you just never know when God will show up!"

No one, after all, had expected God to come in a humble birth in the out of-the-way little town of Bethlehem. And later, nobody much recognized God's presence in Jesus as He taught and healed, confronted and challenged. Even fewer recognized God as Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. Thus Jesus' commands to be ready! Be awake! Be alert, because no one knows how and when God will appear! We believe and trust that God will come someday, yes, but even more, we believe that God is already an active participant in human history as well as our personal histories. We don't always know how or when, but if we are alert and watching, we have a better chance of catching a glimpse of the divine at work. We live trusting that God will repeatedly come into our lives with love and forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. That is what hope in waiting is all about. This is what standing on the threshold of Advent involves.

~ An excerpt from *On a Threshold*,
by Reverend Sarah Jackson Shelton,



On each threshold, **wisdom**;
at every doorway, **love**;
through every entry, **grace**;
with each beginning, **peace**

~ Jan Richardson

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

What images, words or concepts in the passage strike you the most? What is it about them that intrigues you, or moves you, or catches your attention? Jeremiah writes to a particular people in a particular time. But we can also see a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ in his writings. In what ways does this passage tell us that a Savior is coming? What, according to Jeremiah, will this Savior accomplish? How does the coming of Jesus fulfill the longing for freedom of a captive people? As we walk through the spiritual terrain of Advent this year, how might Jesus fulfill our longing for freedom from captivity to things that are not of God? [United Methodist Church of Yucaipa](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 25:1-10](#)

When you are in a difficult situation, what kind of prayer are you likely to pray to God? What does it mean to "lift up" your soul to God? What all does David ask God to do? David began his prayer by saying that he trusted God. In what ways does stanza 3 show that God has integrity—and therefore ought to be trusted? What words and phrases here help you to understand David's current situation? Three times David uses the term remember. What would you want God to remember (and not remember) about you? What do you count on God to do and to be? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

*God our caring Father,
you who gave your beloved Son
to ransom all people,
see our human fears
and love us anyway.*

*Guide us through this season
with quiet, glad anticipation.
Help us to pay attention
to the poor and needy,
and to the lonely among us.*

*Give us a spirit of reflection,
patience with each other,
and hearts brimming with thanks.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

~ Kathy Coffey, [Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board](#)

Anticipate...The Promise

- ◇ What does it look like to focus too much on Christmas during Advent? What activities do people participate in for the preparation of Christmas?
- ◇ How can that change how we experience Advent?
- ◇ What do you think exile was like for the Jewish people? How do people today experience exile in their lives?
- ◇ What does the process of purification look like in a person's life? What types of things does God want to remove from a person's life in order to purify them?
- ◇ In preparing for Christ's second coming, what are some things that God wants to remove from your life?

[Wenatchee Church](#)

3rd Reading: [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#)

Why do you think the condition of the Thessalonians' faith was so important to Paul? How do you think Paul intends to supply what is lacking in their faith? From these verses, who is able to perfect the faith of anyone? Gaining Perspective: Have you ever felt, or perhaps you now feel, that your faith is lacking something? What practical steps can you take to change the situation? Remember, though, it is not the size of your faith that counts but the object of your faith. [Bible.org](#)

4th Reading: [Luke 21:25-36](#)

What kind of "signs" have you seen in your lifetime that remind you of what Jesus is talking about in these verses? If you could ask Jesus a question or two about the end of time, what would you like to ask Him? Jesus warned about people who would mislead people. When was a time that you discovered you had been misled? When was a low time in your life, when you felt that your only option was to "look up"? What gives you hope and trust in God when horrible things happen to you and around you? What is a lesson, a promise, a command, or a warning that you needed to hear? [Simple Church](#)

