Over the course of this summer, my family spent a large amount of time in cars. For the first time since moving to Kansas, we drove rather than flew back to family for our summer vacation. And to stop that off, the kid left North Carolina with my parents, drove to Texas, stayed there for a week, then drove back up to Shawnee.

Needless to say, she is a traveling machine.

At least for other people.

A few months ago we got into the car to visit a colleague in Iola Kansas.

About 30 minutes from home she asked, “Are we there yet?”

“No, we’re not there yet. We just left home.”

Five minutes later, “Are we there yet?”

“No. Look for a green car.” (We play the car game quite often)

Five minutes later after winning the car game, “Are we there yet?”

“No, I’ll tell you when we get there.”

After about fifteen or twenty more, “Are we there yet” inquiries, I exploded,

“No! We are not there yet and if you ask me that question one more time I’ll pull this car over!” After a blessed period of silence, where I apologized for losing my temper, a timid voice came from the back seat, “Will I still be four years old when we get there?”

Friends, we have entered Advent, a time of waiting. Sometimes we wait patiently, and other times not so much. What are we waiting for?

We’re waiting for the rush to Christmas, waiting for guests to join us or to head out to visit others. Waiting to celebrate.

That means there are LOTS of things to be done – presents to buy and wrap, houses to clean and vacuum, exams to finish, papers to grade, shelves to stock, employees to take care of, parties to host and attend.

And in the midst of all this chaos, we’re also supposed to make room for the spiritual aspects of the season.

A busy, busy time to say the least. And a time filled with expectation and waiting.

Our texts also find people waiting. Jeremiah reminding the people in exile that “the days are surely coming” and “praying to have strength to escape these things” are not where we want to start the Advent season. It’s all too reminiscent of apocalyptic predictions and foretelling of destruction.

It brings up images of Jonestown and Heaven’s Gate, Cotton Mather, Hal Lindsey, and Harold Camping and the media circus that surrounds them. We’re tired of seeing these texts and those like them, a fear of being “left behind”, used to scare people to Christ. I do not believe that fear is a way to faith.

As such, we tend to give such apocalyptic proclamations a wide berth. But when we do so, we cede a powerful element of our faith.

Jesus’ example of the fig tree points us in the right direction. It’s actually a message of hope.

Jesus says, “You can tell that winter is almost over when you see the fig tree begin to sprout new leaves.” We know this to be true. As we look out our windows and see desolation in the plants and trees around us, we know that spring will come.

TEXT:
Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
The ice will melt, the south winds will blow, and green will seep out of the gray. We’ve seen it too often to doubt.

Yet, the irony of these texts is not lost on me. As we read the prophet Jeremiah’s vision of peace and righteousness for the land of Israel, a tenuous ceasefire exists between the people who inhabit that land. Who knows how long it will last, or when the next rocket or mortar will fall. Jerusalem does not live in safety. Not by a long shot.

Luke speaks of distress among the nations, signs in the sky, and disruption of the earth. It’s easy to see the correlation to our present time. Yet, those things have been happening since the dawn of time. There have been wars and rumors of wars forever. And there will be for the time to come.

Luke is not holding up a mirror in order to demonstrate the evils of this, or any age. Rather, like Jeremiah, the text is pointing us to the promise of new life, the promise of a vision beyond what we see.

In the midst of the destruction and darkness and cold and death a time of warmth and new life is at hand. We are to live as those who see the dying tree and know that inside, near the surface, is new life ready to spring forth.

We live in hope. How do we live in hope? How do we wait?

Luke says to “be on guard so our hearts are not weighed down’. Paul tells us to “abound in love for one another, and for all, just as we abound in love for you.’ We are called to pay attention.

To watch. To wait. To care for one another and for all. To actively participate in changing the world.

Jesus is calling us to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to house the homeless, to lift up the downtrodden, and to bind up the broken-hearted. Jesus is calling us to not so much look for signs of his coming but rather to be signs of his coming.

As Gandhi said, we must be the change we wish to see in the world. That is what our texts are calling us to as Advent people. As Christians this Advent season, we live as people trusting in God, secure in the hope that God has a vision. And it’s not a future that’s predestined or written in the stars, but rather an invitation to “become the future that we dream about, incrementally embracing life’s fruitfulness and tending to growing things all around us.”

Out of Chaos, we nurture hope.

That is the motto of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. In fact, our Advent candle lighting liturgy comes from PDA. In the face of overwhelming destruction, PDA steps into communities and shares a new vision, one of peace and hope. Through service, supplies, and support they transform communities.

As conflicts flare around the world and Secret Service has increased protection of the President, as families argue heatedly over holiday dinner tables, as gun violence is on the rise, as nature unleashes its power in new and frightening ways, despite all the destruction around us, we are called to see differently.

To be different. To wait in hope. And to share that hope with those that need it most.

What are we waiting for? What is to be born into the world this Advent? Does it fill us with hope or fear? Are we expectant or disengaged? Are we on guard or have we gotten lost in the chaos of our world?

Because we are called to shine the light of God into a dark, destructive world. We are called to bear witness that “the light has come into the world, and the darkness shall not overcome it.”

We should be able to answer, when asked from the backseat, from the back of our minds, “Are we there yet? Is the kingdom of God here?”

“No. But we are on the way.” Amen.

* This sermon draws its movement from a sermon I read by Rev Delmer Chilton on his blog, Lectionary Lab.

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2 Ibid.
4 John 1:5.