

Meditation – Night and Day  
Scripture Readings – Jeremiah 33:14-16, I Thessalonians 3:9-13  
Sunday, December 2, 2018  
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We begin Advent with a reading from the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 33, verses 14-16. While most of the book of Jeremiah pronounces judgment to prepare Judah for exile around 587 BCE, the prophet shifts to words of promise in chapters 30-33, a section which is sometimes referred to as the “Book of Comfort.” This is where we find our reading for today. Jeremiah announces hope in the face of mounting despair. A new branch will spring up. God’s branch will execute justice. In the midst of uncertainty and despair, Jeremiah offers hope in the God who will hold us fast in the night as well as the day. This is the word of God.

*<sup>14</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup> In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.” Amen.*

Our second reading is I Thessalonians 3:9-13. In this letter, which is probably the earliest of his writings, the closeness and affection between Paul and his congregation is evident. In the same way Jeremiah offers hope to ancient Israelites in exile, Paul reassures early Christians who are facing persecution and for whom he prays night and day. Hear now the Word of God.

*<sup>9</sup> How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? <sup>10</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father, God’s very self, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. <sup>13</sup> And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all God’s saints. Amen.*

The title of the Meditation: “Night and Day”

*The text: Night and day we pray most earnestly...I Thessalonians 3:10*

Let us pray. God of Hope, as we begin this holy season of Advent together, we thank you for your loving presence in our lives night and day. As we reflect on the meaning of this season, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Night and day, day and night... when these two words are placed side by side their meaning suggests continuity and steadfastness, faithfulness and fidelity, dependability and trustworthiness.

The love song “Night and Day,” written by Cole Porter in 1932 and made famous by Frank Sinatra is in keeping with the theme of faithfulness and fidelity. *“I think of you night and day...only you beneath the moon or under the sun. Whether near to me or far. No matter, darling where you are, I think of you night and day.*

The ancient Hebrew trusted in God’s steadfast and reliable presence night and day. Listen to these words from Psalm 139:

*Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you...* Night and day, whether near or far, no matter where we are, God's right hand will hold us fast!

On the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writing of the beloved carol *Silent Night, Holy Night*, we are grateful for the gift of our children in a musical presentation of the creative collaboration between the pastor and organist of St. Nicholas's Church in Oberndorf; Austria. The Reverend Joseph Mohr wrote the text and organist Franz Gruber composed the music with a guitar accompaniment to fill an unexpected silence when the organ broke down Christmas Eve 1818.

This melodic carol quietly affirms the God, for whom the night is as bright as the day, entering into our dark night through the birth of a child whose face beams and who brings the dawn of redeeming grace into the day. The circumstances in the writing of this carol remind us that times of challenge, disappointment and brokenness often provide an opportunity for hope, creativity, and something new to spring up.

The human spirit is remarkably resilient, able to stretch and bend and endure through the challenges before us. We have seen it again and again in the history of humankind, in our own families and communities. And part of what makes the human spirit invincible is our ability to hope, especially when "to hope" doesn't make sense, when it's not logical, when it doesn't fit the conventional wisdom! When we are facing mounting despair and we hope, then our hope becomes an act of defiance, brazen and bold!

This is the kind of hope that is at the heart of Advent. This is the hope the prophet Jeremiah offers to the people of Judah. This is the hope for which the Apostle Paul prays night and day on behalf of his beloved congregation in Thessalonica. This is the hope that the Reverend Albert Hale preached to this church as abolitionists worked night and day to free the slaves two decades after the Reverend Mohr wrote the carol *Silent Night*. This is the hope we continue to preach today.

The joyous thing that is to transpire in the coming time is nothing less than the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to revive the house of David. The image is that of a great, felled tree from which a new shoot is to emerge—an image that symbolizes life-out-of-death. But the shoot is no ordinary sprout, feebly attempting to preserve a last vestige of the once-mighty oak or cedar. This is a "righteous branch," one who will fulfill the ancient model of Israelite's kingship by executing justice and righteousness. The branch will become a mighty Tree in its own right. And what makes this Tree mighty is its ability to bow and to bend, to execute justice and to care for the lost and oppressed night and day. The politics of injustice and oppression have no place in the new life God will restore.

As Christians we interpret this scripture in light of the babe born on that silent, holy night. The beginning of Advent is a time of great gladness in our hearts as we remember the new David in the justice and righteousness of the life of Jesus Christ. He is the unexpected king who is not political. He is an oxymoron and a paradox of leadership and love, and the reason for hope. Today we celebrate advent and the hope that is ours in the God who gives the branch of justice and righteousness, the God who came to us in the gift of a child, and the God who holds us fast whether near or far, no matter where we are, night and day. Amen.