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“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Welcome to Advent, the season of waiting and expectation for God’s coming – for the divine breaking into our reality. In Godly Play, the curriculum we use for teaching children here at St. Martin’s, the focus of this Sunday is “Prophecy” and, as we just lit our first Advent candle, we reflected and prayed for “hope.”

But for prophets like Jeremiah, hope is hard-won. In the majority of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah, although he is called by God and initially delights in receiving God’s word – quickly finds that to be aligned with and called to prophesy in his age is to suffer. With God’s word planted in him, Jeremiah’s task was to prophesy against his own people – to share God’s plan of judgment upon them in the form of their conquest by the Babylonian Empire and their long exile. And while Jeremiah lived, this came to pass. At the beginning of the chapter in which we find our Old Testament lesson today, Jeremiah received his word from God about a Messiah, a king – an anointed leader, “while he was still confined in the court of the guard.”¹

While this message is one of hope, especially as we read it in light of the advent, or coming, of Jesus into the world, it is one of hard-won hope. In the chapters before this, Jeremiah’s message has been one of gloom and suffering – to the point that he tries to stop preaching and prophesying in order to avoid the pain of condemning his own people who, of course, are not exactly pleased about his message, and so take it out on him.

Now he is in jail. If the conquest and exile have not yet taken place, they are imminent. And it is now that a new prophesy comes – a prophesy of a new covenant. No

¹ Jer 33:1

longer will the will and word of God be outside of his people – no longer will there need to be prophets to mediate God’s judgment and mercy – for God will write the divine word on the tablet of their hearts.² The long exile between God and humanity will be over.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus draws from the ancient prophetic tradition, specifically from the Apocalyptic tradition of Daniel, which is where we first see in the Hebrew Scriptures the expanse of world history coming to a great conclusion when “the Son of Man” breaks into our reality and rules with perfect wisdom and righteousness. Of course, we now understand this “Son of Man” to be Jesus himself, come again in glory to end the world as we know it, ending the world’s exile from God forever. A message which is Hope, even as it is also terrifying.

But this is just one interpretation and one, which does not take into account the parable of the fig tree at the heart of our passage, or Jesus’ declaration that “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.” Was he mistaken? Or, as I propose, do we need to adjust our understanding of time?

While we in our modern society consider time to be objective, measurable, mathematical, and linear – ancient peoples, and even modern physics, have a different understanding. In our taking on a church calendar, which mirrors the change in seasons and the agricultural cycle as we also mark historical events of God’s work in human history, we are mirroring the understanding of the ancient Israelites. In some mysterious, even sacramental way, they understood their yearly festivals, marking the Exodus for example, as their entering into that divine action and reality. Their understanding of time was cyclical and theological – God working through the established fertility cycles of plants and through the movements of stars and planets.

The prophetic understanding of time, too, was always one of multiple fulfilment: for example, Jeremiah speaking God’s word through his own perception of time was speaking directly to a political reality and then to a promise of fulfilment – but as one scholar compared this – one can see a single mountain range and not see until you’re

² Jer 31:31-34

closer that it is actually a series of hills and valleys. In summary, our time is not God's Time.

But what is Jesus talking about with his parable of the fig tree? In the ancient Greek there is a word for the perspective on time Jesus is describing: *kairos*. Kairos time is not a quantitative understanding of time but a *qualitative* one – it refers to the proper time for something, some opportune time for action. It emphasizes change and a fruitful waiting. In this understanding of time, we are not peering towards a distant horizon trying to understand the future, which is known to God alone. No, we are deeply attuned to the present and to the larger ordering of things. As one with the divine Word, Jesus, we wait – but not the endless waiting as you might do at the DMV. No, it's a waiting that is poised and attentive to God's movement in time – to God's Time. It is a kind of Hope that is active, requiring everything from us. As we enter into this season of waiting, this *kairos*, we are invited to enter into God's history, God's Time, through the salvation stories of Scripture, the hymns of the Church, and the workings of the Universe around us. We are a people called to the brave and challenging task of Hope, but in this season we are not alone – we are joined by all the generations before our time and after, as we long for and eagerly await the end to our Great Exile. Amen.