

Sermon 2006 Advent 1

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Theme: "Looking for a Limo and Missing the Boat!"

People are often fascinated with magicians. I think I went through about three "magic kits" when I was a kid – you know those kits with the cape, the top hat, the wand, a deck of cards – a book on how to do the tricks. And no matter how hard I practiced, I could never be as smooth as those professional magicians. I was always trying to perform the trick perfectly, but what I didn't understand until much later was that the magician's game is really misdirection. If he can get you to look left while he is doing something on the right, he doesn't even have to be particularly smooth with the trick.

Satan is a master magician. Satan cannot alter reality, but he does not want us ever to see how incredibly wonderful God's plan is. Now, he can't change reality, so his only option is misdirection. He just has to keep us looking somewhere else and frankly we don't make his work very difficult.

In general, we are pretty willing subjects because we don't really believe that God's way can really be **that** wonderful. I mean what's so called paradise like anyway? We talk about

heaven being full of beauty and peace and love, but forever is a LONG time and do you really want to spend forever floating around on clouds and strumming a harp?

I know that this sounds sacrilegious but I think God wants us to be honest about what we feel. What about smoking? Will heaven be smoke free? Most of you might hope so, but I was kind of looking forward to a big fat Cuban cigar with a glass of 21 year old single malt scotch. I mean once I'm dead, cancer's no longer a factor right? Or what about hunting and fishing? I guess killing stuff isn't very congruent with paradise, but does going to paradise mean that I'll never get another beautifully rare porterhouse?

See how Satan works? He can get me so worked up about being bored and being void of my vices that I can completely forget that paradise is nothing I can really grasp and all the things I enjoys are just twisted reflections of the perfect reality that awaits me.

Jeremiah writes to his people, Israel. Now these are people who often got all caught up in this life and forgot that God

operates on a whole different level from them. We rarely get to see exactly what he is doing or why he is doing it. Mostly we walk by faith and just do what he says because he says it. But Jeremiah's people were so concerned with this life that he was afraid they were going to miss the next life.

Babylon was hundreds of times more powerful than Israel and in fact God had told Jeremiah that he was using Babylon to humble Israel. They could not win. They could not have it their way. It had to be God's way or the highway and Jeremiah told that to King Zedekiah. So King Zedekiah let Jeremiah get locked up to shut him up.

The idea that God might use a heathen nation to discipline Israel was not acceptable. Of course Israel wanted to be delivered from the political mess they were in and returned from exile but they were waiting for God's big black limo to pull into downtown Babylonia and rescue them. The truth is, God's more likely to be riding on a fishing trawler than a limousine. But sometimes we are so invested in looking for, whining about and praying for that limo that we miss the boat.

That's Satan's game. Keep us distracted. Keep us looking for the wrong thing. And so here we are once again at the first Sunday in Advent. There is no time of the Church year in which distractions are more plentiful. We have Frosty the Snowman and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer to distract us. We have holiday parties and gift shopping and travel preparations to distract us. Satan works double time to distract us during this time of year because Advent is a whole season designed to help us see through the ribbons and bows and to look for the important things.

Zedekiah was not willing to submit to God's way because it frankly didn't look like much fun. Captivity in Babylon was not consistent with the way Zedekiah thought things should be. He was looking for a limo and he missed the boat. Don't miss the boat.

All the social conventions that surround Christmas spill into Advent and all but completely overshadow this season of preparation.

“But Pastor, why can’t we sing Christmas carols in Advent?”

“Because it’s Advent!” This is the time we push out of the way all the earthly ideas of what’s good and what’s fun and resolutely squint into the East watching for our Lord who will return for us and end all of the social conventions. This is the time we remember that our all powerful king has restored us as his chosen people and now we watch for his return when our restoration will be complete and you and I will once again shine forth in all of our glory because Jesus has put everything right for us by his death and damnation on the cross.

We don’t get delivered in a limo. It’s more like a fishing trawler really. It’s not pretty, deliverance from sin, death and the devil; it’s not pretty at all. It’s not all rainbows and flowers like we would like it. It’s not all babies and mangers and sweetly melancholy songs sung to candlelight, either. It’s blood and gore dripping from a cross. It’s death and screams of the agony of damnation echoing through a desolate night – that moment in which God turned his back on his son for our sake.

It's not our way; not the way we would do it at all. It's God's way. But it is the right way and it is the way of true joy that is unlike anything we can imagine in life as we know it. When all is said and done, it is all that is important. The limos of life are not important. Just don't miss the boat. Amen.