

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid
 The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost | Luke 12:32-40; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
 St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Sinking Spring, PA
 August 11th 2019

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is amazing the things that we have become capable of knowing, and we've come quite a long way from where we've been in the past:

We've gone from staring up at the sky in wonder to flying people into outer space and onto the moon!
 We've made it so that diseases which once plagued entire populations now require a simple trip to the doctor's office to fix.
 And when we're separated by long distances from our friends and families, we've built devices that allow us to connect with others across the globe in a matter of seconds.

And yet, no matter how advanced we become or what we achieve and accomplish, there will always be things that we either can't know or of which we can't be certain:

What will the markets do this week?
 How many games will the Eagles win this year?
 What will the Episcopal Church look like in fifty years?
 Will it have kept the faith?

There will never be a technology so great or an advancement so powerful that will give us concrete knowledge of what the future holds. Perhaps our greatest knowledge of what may happen in the future is a different kind of knowledge entirely -- this knowledge isn't necessarily marked by technical facts and mathematical precision but rather "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This is how the Letter to the Hebrews describes our faith, as something that begins as a promise from God and then continues on in our relationship with God and our trust of God.

But even in this faithful knowledge of God when promised to us or predicted in the prophecies of old, we rarely know with great detail the things that are to come. Some of these prophecies have already come to pass, and some we may still be looking for. Like in our Isaiah reading today, we hear a prophet's strong words against Judah and Jerusalem, a people who had, at times, lost their way. But even in the midst of these critical words, there is a hope of things not seen, or yet to be seen, at least:

"Though your sins are like scarlet,
 they shall be like snow;
 though they are red like crimson,
 they shall become like wool."

The people of God must always live in the hope of glory, that even when things are bleak, like when their sins are as red as scarlet, God promises a better future, a holy future, when God will make them as innocent as freshly fallen snow.

Elsewhere in our faith story, Jesus' disciples heard again and again that "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, be killed, and on the third day be raised." And of course, all of those things happened. But when it came time for Jesus' Passion, they abandoned him, having forgotten his words or not understood them to the point of failing to recognize the very events Jesus told them would happen.

And so we have learned to look forward, that we might trust in God's words for our future, that we may not miss the signs that are to come. Our whole season of Advent is like this, but in reality, we are always Advent people -- not just for four weeks a year, but always we look to God's good promises, that we might find comfort and truth and life in what is coming next -- like those great words we hear in Revelation: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

Like the many who have come before us in the faith, we greet these prophecies from a distance, confident that God will be faithful in his good time to provide those things which have been promised. That's our hope as Christians, that before we are faithful, it is God who is faithful. This is what we know, this is what we hope for, this is what we believe. Because of all the things in which we have faith, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," the greatest thing we believe in is not a thing at all but the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate goal of faith, assured and hoped for, the one in whom our conviction lies and by whom our faith is empowered.

However, our faith in Christ is a kind of knowledge that is never finished while we are still on this earth. For all that we know, and for all that we have come to believe, and all the promises of God we hope for and wait for, there is one promise in particular that even Jesus didn't know fully. It is perhaps the greatest of God's promises which we believe will happen, but that otherwise, we know little about. We proclaim it in the Creeds, we affirm it every time we celebrate the Eucharist, and we are often reminded of the expectation of this great coming day. This promise is "Christ will come again, in glory, to judge the living and the dead, and that his kingdom will last forever." Today we hear of it in the Gospel reading as well, as Jesus tells the disciples what he *does* know about the greatest prophecy for which we still wait -- that like a thief in the night, we don't know when Christ will come again. "You also must be ready," he says, "for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

We await Christ's coming without knowing when he will come, but rightly, as our Advent hymn before the Gospel reminded us, we are to live prepared, "With hearts and hands uplifted...to see the day of earth's redemption." That is what the Church *does* know -- that's something the Church been doing here for a long time, and you each are a part of this 2,000 year-old story in faith, that the mission of the Church and faith in Christ continues on here and now.

Even when there are part of our lives that are uncertain, and certainly there are things we don't and can't know, we do know and believe that it is the Father's good pleasure to give his little flock the kingdom -- and he has done so even now, for the kingdom, as Jesus says, is among you, even within you. We don't know when Christ will come again, but our knowledge and love of God will guide us in this present, expectant time to live as Jesus describes -- to be dressed for action, to have our lamps lit, to be ready. Because for all we do know, we look for Christ's coming and his kingdom in hope, in the knowledge that the best way to prepare for life in that kingdom to come is to live into the life of that kingdom now, on earth, as it is in heaven, both now and to the end of the age.

Amen.