

Being in Jeopardy - Impinged Upon

By Walter Brueggemann

First Sunday of Advent, Year C

Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36

We are enmeshed in a kind of technological satisfaction, overly impressed with our achievements, imagining that our affluence and capacity to manage our lives are somehow signs of well-being. We are tempted to conclude, "It doesn't get any better than this." Because we are enmeshed and overly impressed, we hold desperately to the way things are. We resist change. We begrudge intrusion of what is new. We assume a posture of defensiveness to guard our way of life.



Advent is an invitation to see the world differently. Advent invites us not to be so enmeshed with the present, not to be overly impressed with things as they are, not to be so committed to and defensive of all our current arrangements. Advent is an assertion that all our present stands under judgment. The present will end-and we cannot stop it from ending. It will be displaced by another arrangement of life that God will give. We are invited to live precisely at that juncture where the present is jeopardized and God's new future begins to impinge upon us. Our theme is *being jeopardized and impinged upon*.

Notice how the word "righteous-ness" occurs three times in these verses of Jeremiah as the dominant accent of the passage. God's promise is a new reality, shaped as righteousness and justice, that will impinge upon us. This theme of "justice and righteousness" is central to biblical hope. It is a vision of new relations-between God and the world, between neighbor and neighbor, between human creatures and all of creation. This new way of relating is one in which there is no threat or fear or hurt or exploitation. God will overcome

the power of evil, destructiveness, and death. All will "dwell secure" (v. 16) with no one afraid of any other. It is promised! It is coming!

The teaching of Jesus (Luke 21:25-36) speaks with specificity about the new impingement. The newness of Jeremiah-which sounds so great-will not come easily because it is drastic. It will not be welcomed, because it is a threat to our present arrangements. All of us have a stake in old, defensive arrangements. We benefit from our patterns of fear and intimidation. We enjoy advantage due to someone else's disadvantage. We will not easily give up our advantage.

The coming of summer is a way of speaking of the time for judgment which is very, very near (vv. 29-30). Jesus and the early church believed that the kingdom of God, the new power arrangement, the establishment of God's new right relations is very near and will happen soon. This conviction of Jesus is the concern of Advent. We ponder the newness that is near, a newness that threatens us and for which we must be ready.

Readiness for God's new governance is the subject of verses 34-36. Advent is about readiness. The elements of preparation named here concern being weighed down with *self-indulgence* (dissipation and drunkenness) and with the *cares of this life* (v. 34). We may consider such self-indulgence as consumerism that reduces all of life and all persons to useful commodities. We may consider the "cares of this life" to refer, among other things, to economic anxiety, our mad pursuit of profit, security, affluence, and control.

Advent is a time for reflection and self assessment. It is a time for taking stock of how enmeshed we are in modes of self-indulgence and how overly impressed we are with our capacity to secure ourselves. We are invited to "take heed" (v. 24). We are invited to "watch and pray" (v. 36), to watch for signs of God's new kingdom which are elusive, and to pray, i.e., to submit to the dangerous newness.

Jeremiah focuses on the new king (Branch). Jesus focuses on the coming "Son of Man." Both motifs of new king and Son of Man are translated in the church's life into the coming of Jesus at Christmas. Jesus is the sign and embodiment of God's new age of righteousness and justice, the gift of right relations, right distribution of power, right attitudes and actions of caring. The rule of Jesus makes new behavior possible.

We could receive a new world, a new set of relations, a fresh possibility. We could start again. But that entails disengaging from the old habits and joining new practices. The spin offs are in politics, economics, and social relations. But the access point is watching and praying for small signs of impingement.

QUESTIONS:

1. What in my life of self-indulgence and self-serving is placed in jeopardy by the promises of God?
2. What are the dimensions of new justice and new righteousness that are so important to me?
3. How can I watch faithfully in this season for deep transformative possibilities?

PRAYER:

You are the God who shakes up old things and who brings newness. It is your kingdom and your rule that is drawing near. Give us patience and discipline to watch for your coming rule, that we may receive your gift of new relations as that gift comes among us. Amen.

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