

Tension.

We have tension, and not just that stress that sits across our shoulder blades – requiring a 60 minute massage.

Tension across the country, across our tables, across our desks. Lives are full of tension.

Even Advent, this season of the church. The color blue – both means sadness and hope, a mix of day and night, not penitent or joyful, just blue. Our Advent Music...it isn't really happy music, but not gloomy and dark as the season of Lent.

Think back to the This Is The feast song – a perfect example of the style. Last year that tune was questioned because it was kind of gave a weird vibe during Advent.

I didn't think much about it until now.

But maybe it is appropriate. We are in a weird, tense season in the church.

We are waiting...for Christ, and Jesus is coming. But Jesus has already come. But Jesus will come again.

Waiting for incarnation, the birth – but also 2nd coming.

Advent leaves us with the blue tense feeling we have about life in general. Leaving us contentious.

Advent reflects life well.

As we talked about Wed night at the Thanksgiving service – often we have lamenting, sadness, in the middle of celebrating, and giving thanks. Those two feelings can be held together in tension.

Uncertainty, division, questions, sadness, doubt...life tensions are held together, while we seek answers, while we hope, while we pray. We live in the tension – and still muddle through the everyday – still work, still go to church, still visit family, still cheer on the Packers, even as chaos swirls around us.

My friend Sarah – who I mentioned has stage 4 cancer, is teaching me all the time about tension and faith and life, an example for many. She might think talking to me helps her – but she doesn't realize what her story does for me. Maybe the tension we live life with, gives simple tasks different meanings, and a different perspective.

Her tensions ranged from when to decorate for Christmas – so it didn't interfere with chemo treatments – to telling the kids about the cancer – to getting a normal schedule back for the family – without being overwhelmed with house guests – to capturing some memories – without letting cancer dictate their life.

Celebrating Advent – is strange because we recognize that cancer isn't solved, politics are unstable, job loss is reality, suffering is commonplace – yet we hope one day all of the sadness will be gone. But for now we wait, and at the same time, we are hopeful for what is to come.

Advent is waiting and celebrating. It is the incarnation, baby Jesus in the manger – and Christ the King Jesus the 2nd coming waiting...who comes back to judge the living and the dead, and to take all the dead home to him.

Being in the middle – makes me tense.

I'm sure Daniel had some of that same tension. He stands up for faith in God. He is in a minority position – and he stands up against the corrupt powers. The powers who manipulate King Darius to make the edict of worship – just so they can catch Daniel breaking the law.

But Daniel remains faithful and strong. All the way to the depth and darkness of the lion den – and I bet full of tension and fear. Facing death, but at the same time relying on God.

Yet, he still does not know the outcome, or even the process – until he landed on that dirt floor with hungry lions surrounding him. And they don't open their mouths.

And that makes the story perfect for this season of hope. We don't know – but we have hope. Not a cheap hope either.

Cheap hope would be in winning the lottery – to pay our church bills. Cheap hope is hope in ourselves.

Advent hope – is about life and death, and others. We don't know when Jesus will come back. We hope that when it happens, that all the promises in which we hope – will be fulfilled. But no one can know for sure, there really is no blessed assurance. It is all faith-filled hope. We don't know how God is going to act. And it isn't up to us.

That is why faith is no easy thing, and why the difference between those with faith and those without faith is a paper thin line. No one is sure. Hope in an uncertain outcome – is risky, and filled with tension. Maybe the biggest different is that those of faith have a community that similarly hopes together.

Probably the greatest misconception of disciples of Christ – is that we have it all figured out, that problems are solved, and we live the prosperous life. This past week I talked with a 93 yr old former bishop – who said he is still trying to get right with God, after all these years. And he isn't there; he will never get there.

Because our hope isn't placed in our ability to get things right.

Life isn't spent trying to save self, to make self-better, to get right with God. Only Jesus can do that. And Jesus is Coming.

We live now – in the struggle in the tension, day by day...with the great hope to come.

And Jesus is Coming.

We pray fervently, we trust God working through humans, we hope for the best, we do our best – but still know nothing will be perfect until Jesus comes back. And Jesus is Coming.

We go through the same struggles as anyone. We often are left blue - cancer, death, evil – doesn't pick and choose whom it affects. But there will be a day when there is no pain or tears...because Jesus is Coming.

Yes, Jesus is here already, but Jesus is Coming.

God grants us the strength to worship now, to help our neighbor, to love and care for God's people – to ease some of the tension that this world hands us – but Jesus is Coming.

We prepare, we hope, we wait, but we don't sit idle, we aren't content – we keep fighting for what is right, for this world to be better, no matter if we don't know the final outcome, we actively stand up for faith,

feed the hungry and give shelter and clothe the
naked, face death and fear with the grace of God,
take on lions with the strength of God, live lives
stirred by Jesus' teaching – because Jesus is
Coming.

That's our hope.

Amen.