

Sermon Title: **“In Hope: Be Alert!”**

Bible: **Jeremiah 33:14-16 & Luke 21:25-36**

When: on the 1st Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Do Not Be Afraid of Santa!

I hope that you had a great Thanksgiving with your family, friends, or neighbors. Now it is time for Advent and Christmas! Can you remember your first moment of meeting Santa Claus when you were young? I cannot remember my first time meeting Santa. Because I lived in an apartment which did not have a chimney, I used to try to stay up all night near the balcony while waiting for Santa. But I fell asleep. However, on Christmas morning, I received my toy that I wanted. So, Christmas has been one of the happiest days of the year, because I was able to receive my toy wishlist.

But sometimes, I have met some preschoolers who are afraid of Santa Claus. Maybe, to meet a white long-bearded grandfather figure who wears a red outfit only once a year is not that familiar to some kids. So, they are just afraid to meet Santa and they cry, and want to go to their parents. This is kind of a sad or embarrassing moment. So, because they cry, they cannot receive a Christmas gift from Santa, right? No, regardless of their crying, every kid receives a

Christmas gift. And the kids learn that the Christmas gift came from Santa, and we do not need to be afraid of Santa at all. Just like me, I believe that we are waiting with anticipation for Christmas, Santa, and Christmas gifts.

2. The Coming of Jesus Christ

The prophet Jeremiah is known as a “weeping prophet.” After the exile of 587 BCE, the people lost their places to live and had to witness the destruction of the temple where they had worshipped God. All they could do was just to weep and cry out to God. There are seven laments of Jeremiah, and these are some examples: “But I was like a gentle lamb, led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me...” (Jeremiah 11:19) “How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? ...” (Jeremiah 12:4) “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?...” (Jeremiah 15:18) All we can feel here is only darkness and hopelessness.

After all of the tears and crying, through the darkness, and through hopelessness, the word of God came to the prophet Jeremiah. The words of restoration, justice, and hope came to the prophet Jeremiah. Today’s scripture reading of Jeremiah is that part. It was the promise of the Lord. It is not dependent upon the people, but depends on God’s grace and time, because God promised. The days are surely coming! It is the promise of restoration of David’s branch and Jerusalem. In my understanding, it is the baby Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham, according to the Gospel of Matthew. We do not need to go to a specific place to worship our Lord. We can worship wherever we are, because our Lord’s

place cannot be limited to being within a small place like the temple or the city of Jerusalem. If people expect only a king, another conqueror, or a military officer, who would save them from oppression, they cannot welcome the baby Jesus Christ, the most vulnerable one. If people expect only the blessings of limited places, they might try to put God's abundant love and grace into a small box. Unlike our expectations and beyond our knowledge, God's promise can be different from ours. God's love and grace is abundant and overflowing. So, where we are here and now, we can experience God's love and grace. God's way cannot be going upward to rule over the people, but coming down to serve others. So, we can feel God's love and see God's promise through the baby Jesus Christ. In this way, we might want to be alert all the time, because God's love and grace can be found unexpectedly in our own daily lives.

3. The Return of Jesus Christ

When people asked for the signs of Jesus, Jesus answered that with today's scripture reading of the Gospel of Luke. The signs such as wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues look very specific. But when you hear news of war, earthquake, famine or plague on TV or radio, is it your first time to hear about them? Even though we are connected to each other around the world, we do not hear about all the good and bad news on the earth. Usually we hear about more life-threatening events, rather than the good news, but these things are kind of common events around the world.

How about the fig tree parable? When does the fig tree and all the trees sprout leaves? Is it

spring, right? Then, which spring in what year will it be? Will it be 10 years later or another thousand years later? We do not know when. The signs sound very specific and detailed, and they sound very common too, these days. So, my way of understanding the signs is not to be afraid, but to hope –in other words, to accept them not as a warning, but as a reminder. The reminder that God’s kingdom is already here and now, but it is not completed yet. Jesus Christ came to us, and showed love and grace through his life on the cross, death, and resurrection. Even though our life is not easy; even though we can doubt; even though we can misunderstand; even though we can suffer and cry; even though we can make mistakes, God still loves us, and we are God’s loved ones all the time. As God’s kingdom is already here and now we can live day by day with joy! In this broken world and in our fragile lives, we can still experience God’s love and grace. As it has not been completed yet, we do not need to be disappointed or discouraged, and we can live with hope! At the end, Jesus Christ will come again to complete the kingdom of God!

4. Hope: Be Alert

Jesus Christ came to us and to all of the people to show and share God’s unconditional love and God’s abundant and overflowing grace. We do not need to be afraid of Santa’s appearance. We do not need to worry about our crying or mistakes. Regardless of our mistakes or crying, Santa will bring a Christmas gift to us, because we are all beloved children. Likewise, we might be afraid of God’s appearance or encounter, because it can be different from our expectation. Because it can be the very first time, we might not be familiar

with that. But we will know that it is God. So, please do not be afraid of God and Jesus Christ. And we do not need to worry about our misunderstanding, confusion, or doubt about God. Regardless of what we did, Jesus Christ is coming to us, because he loves us! He knows us, invites us, and waits for us. God's love and grace is a gift to us. This gift might be different from what we thought or what we expected. But are you ready to receive the most precious gift, the baby Jesus Christ, the most vulnerable one in your lives? So be alert not to miss this opportunity to meet Jesus Christ during this season of Advent!

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, during this season of Advent, we are waiting for you. You are with us, and you want to come to us again with your love and grace. Please help us to be alert to welcome and accept you, even though it can be different from what we thought. Thank you so much for your promise of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.