

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
1 Advent; November 28, 2021

One hundred and sixty-five years ago, two 20-year-olds became the king and queen of Hawaii. Their names were Kamehameha and Emma. It was 1855, and the islands had been decimated by smallpox. It was a time of grief and uncertainty. The young rulers could easily have been overwhelmed, but they steadfastly devoted themselves to the needs of their people. They raised funds and built the first major hospital on the islands; they founded schools and churches and aid organizations. Still today, they are revered in Hawaii, and they're some of the few indigenous people honored as saints in our church. Today is their feast day.

What they teach us is that challenges come in every generation, and in those times we have a choice; we can submit to fear and be paralyzed by the moment, or we can move forward in hope. Our readings today reflect this tension.

The first comes from Jeremiah, who foretells the coming of the Messiah. "In those days, I will fulfill the promise I made," says the Lord. "I will cause a branch to spring up from the house of David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

This is the hopeful proclamation that we expect to hear in Advent, but our gospel offers a more foreboding vision – signs in the heavens, distress among nations, people fainting from fear. Be on guard, Jesus says, for the Kingdom of God is coming near. Traditionally, we interpret this as the second coming of Christ, and it's not quite as peaceful a vision, at least not in this passage.

So here we have two glimpses of expectation – one full of hope and one full of fear – and in both a spiritual and chronological sense, we live somewhere in between. Our lives are buffered by this tension. It's easy to feel overwhelmed and let the fear win out. There's always plenty to worry about – the latest variant of the virus, climate change and social injustice, our own health and safety and security. But the season of Advent redirects us and points us in the direction of hope. It doesn't

mean that those challenges go away, but we have a new courage to face them because Christ is coming to face them with us. He is coming, Jeremiah says, with a message of justice and righteousness and peace, and he invites us to join him in the pursuit of that dream.

That's our invitation this morning, to choose hope, or better, to act in hope like Emma and Kamehameha. To help us on the way, I have something I'd like to try. We had to shorten our services during the pandemic, and one thing I'm sure you've noticed is that we haven't recited the Nicene Creed in a long time. You may or may not have missed it, and I'll grant you that it can feel sort of rote and outdated, but it's also one of the pillars of our tradition because it ties us to the historical church. So, we're going to bring the Creed back today, but we're going to do it differently. We're going to say it in the form of the Baptismal Covenant. It's the same language but it's done responsively. It engages our hearts and minds in a deeper way, I think, and it also has those final questions that bring it down into the context of our lives and how we live out our faith.

That's a fitting way to begin Advent because those baptismal promises define what it means to live for others and what it means to live in hope. The Creed reminds us who Jesus is, and those promises remind us who we need to be in response. So, let's try it. Please stand as you are able, turn to the inside of your bulletin, and let's renew our vows together as we redirect ourselves toward hope...