

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 12/01/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

First Sunday in Advent

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, December 1st

Luke 21:25-36

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Hope

This is the first Sunday of the new liturgical year and the first Sunday in Advent. The theme of this Sunday is hope. Biblical hope is the confidence that, by integrating God's redemptive acts in the past with trusting human responses in the present, the faithful will experience the fullness of God's goodness both in the present and in the future.

Transitioning into lectionary cycle C, Luke becomes the featured Gospel for this year. The Gospel lection is taken from Luke's version of Mark's so-called Little Apocalypse (Mark 13). While apocalyptic literature (literally *unveiling* or *revelation*) may appear strange to us, it is usually associated with times of oppression and persecution and reveals God's actions and coming judgment as time moves forward to when God will bring history to an end. This literary genre proclaims a message of hope in a coded language using vivid imagery and symbols which is only understandable by insiders.

As we prepare our hearts and minds during this Advent season, we begin on this first Sunday of Advent by looking ahead to the end of salvation history and look forward to the second coming of Christ. As disciples we know the end of the story. No matter what happens in our world, we have the surety of God's promise that Christ will come again and restore creation. This is our hope. Therefore, despite all what is happening in our world, we must not become overly concerned about such world events or our own setbacks and disappointments. Living in hope sets us free to live for Christ and to be the hope for others. We can live in faithful discipleship, loving and worshipping God, and loving and serving our neighbors.

Luke 21:25-36 Commentary

For context, the Gospel lection is part of a dialogue that begins with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (21:5-6) and when His disciples question when this will happen and what will be the sign (v.7). Jesus responds by foretelling of wars and persecution (vv.10-19) and the destruction of Jerusalem (vv.20-24). Jesus then turns to a more distant future and foretells of His second coming and the associated cosmic events (vv. 25-36).

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

There will be great changes in the skies of cosmic significance as well as earth-shattering events transforming all of creation at the return of Christ. Interestingly the word use for "world" is *oikoumenē* which refers more to the political and economic aspects of world and sometimes refers to the Roman Empire. The second coming will be

visible to all, be threatening to the worldly powers and will bring history to a close. When these unmistakable things begin to happen, we are told to have hope and confidence as the redemption of our bodies will shortly take place (1 Corinthians 15:53; Romans 8:23).

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

The fig tree analogy illustrates when the signs of vv. 25-26 occur, Christ's return will be imminent.

³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.

There are several interpretations for this difficult verse. The word translated as "generation" is *genea*. This word can also refer to "race" or "family". One interpretation is the generation alive at the time would witness the beginning events described in vv. 5-24 but not the completion. Another interpretation is there will be multiple fulfillments and generation here refers to Jesus' disciples from that age to the end. Yet another interpretation is the word generation refers to the Jewish race.

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Here Jesus is emphasizing the divine authority and thus the absolute permanence of His teaching. This is the source of our hope.

³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The section concludes with two warnings, and it is clearly stated that such applies to people all over the world. We are warned to be prepared and to be faithful.

Reflection and Action

One lens through which to view this apocalyptic text is vv.8-9:

⁸ And he [Jesus] said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

These verses suggest this information is given to us for two reasons: First, that we should not be led astray by the various false teachers that seem to plague every generation of Christians. Second, so that when such worldly and cosmic events happen, we should not be terrified. History is working towards its inevitable conclusion.

According to Luke we are living between two great events of where God invades history - the birth of Jesus Christ in the flesh, His passion, death, and resurrection and the coming of Christ in His glory at the end of time in great power and glory to bring history to a close. A useful analogy of where we are in history relative to the consummation of history is to consider WWII in Europe. We know the war in the European Theater officially ended on May 8th, 1945. This is known as V-E Day. A military historian will likely say that the eventual defeat of the Nazis was a foregone conclusion a day or two after June 6th, 1944. This was D-Day when the Allies successfully achieved a beachhead on the Normandy coast. From this point forward, it was just a matter of time. D-Day was the clear turning point. Using this analogy, we know the consummation of history when Christ returns is the equivalent of V-E Day (only we don't know the exact date!). The death of Christ on the cross (followed by His resurrection) is the equivalent of D-Day. This is the turning point. In this case, it is the turning point of the entire human history. This was the event predicted in Genesis 3:14.

We are living in occupied territory somewhere between D-Day and V-E Day. We don't know when V-E Day will be, but we know there will be one. Just like the road from D-Day to V-E Day was not without its ups and downs (an example being the Battle of the Bulge - the last German counter-offensive through the Ardennes, December 1944-January 1945), we are living in a fallen world. We will face persecutions. Although we are living in occupied

territory, we should not be cowering in the shadows but demonstrating our confidence of ultimate victory because we know the end of the story. This is the hope of Advent: If you walk with Christ, you may lose your life but will never lose your soul.

While we live in hope, we do not simply wait in hope. To continue the WWII analogy, we are resistance fighters living in enemy occupied territory. We are called to be the resistance against the fallen worldly powers who are the enemies of Christ. We are the counterculture. It is in living out our faith in love that we become the hope for others. When we are the hands and feet of Christ in our world, we reflect the hope of a world that will be.

¹⁴ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

[Jeremiah 33:14-16]

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

[1 Thessalonians 3:11-13]

"... in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

[1 Peter 3:15].

