

Sermon Luke 21:25-31

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I want to wish all a belated Happy New Year. Last week was the beginning of a new year.

No, I haven't lost it.

This is a new year, a new year for the church.

It is the ecclesiastical new year – it is Advent - and as you can see, everything is a bit different now.

The colors are different, and there's a sense of festivity in the air ... well, maybe not a sense of festivity, but there probably should be. Advent is a significant time in the Christian calendar. It's when we anticipate what is coming!

The word 'Advent' comes from the Latin verb 'adventus' - to come towards. We are coming towards something.

What is that important event we are looking forward to? Please don't say, 'Santa Claus is coming to town'. Now, I don't want to down play the fact that Santa Claus is coming, nor that Christmas is coming, with all its festivities and joy and of course, commercialism. But what we celebrate during Advent is not that Christmas is coming, nor that Santa Claus is coming, but that Jesus Christ our Lord is coming!

I saw a T-shirt, once that said. 'Jesus is coming, look busy'. Just pause for a minute. That particular joke should make us think about what we are doing in life, what we would want to be found doing if Jesus suddenly appeared. Are we living a Christian life? Do we follow his teachings? Do we truly love God? Do we love our neighbors?

As we read in the Scriptures about the second coming of Jesus, and while it is 'good news' in the best sense possible, it is good news that is surrounded by a lot of concerning news. Indeed, the festivities of Advent, from an ecclesiastical point of view, do have a rather sad feel to them. The Gloria is not recited in our service. There are no flowers adorning the altar.

Jesus is not here yet. We are awaiting His arrival.

Look at our colors this morning! While the rest of the country is decking itself out in the Christmas colors of red and green, we have moved to the other end of the ecclesiastical spectrum - donning violet, the color of somber reflection.

You see, we are also solemnizing the second coming of Jesus.

But, while we rejoice at the thought of Jesus returning, we recognize that this will take place in the midst of great human pain, and nowhere is that made more clear than in our Gospel reading this morning, and I quote:

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" The Second coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

There's not much that is Christmas-like about this picture, at least in terms of the commercial version of Christmas. There's not a lot of similarity here between the coming of Jesus and the coming of old St Nick!

There is a festive atmosphere, days of joy. There are many organizations seeking funds and dispersing them to ease the lives of the needy,. There is one organization among these which is more visible in their work, a work which reflects the spirit of the season. They are seen in front of grocery stores and other locations. They are seen all over with their "Red Kettle" and people ringing their bell, raising funds in a loving manner in the name of Jesus. Funds which they spend in a truly Christian manner on those in need.

Now, I don't want to bash secular Christmas, particularly because it is still a celebration of the birth of Jesus, and most of the symbols we associate with Christmas do find their origin in the Bible and in the story of Jesus' birth. Even so, I do feel that while Christmas is a Christian celebration, our modern version really reflects more the materialistic mood of the day than it does the original message.

The modern version of Christmas is reflected in slogans about how this special season brings out the best in people - a season of family and goodwill, as seen in Tiny Tim walking into the room and saying 'God bless us one and all'. The biblical pictures of Advent show us both joy and pain as the new world is brought to birth.

We remember Jesus discussing His ministry at that last supper. It was a quiet, genteel affair until Jesus began breaking bread and pouring out wine, telling the Apostles about His broken body, and His blood flowing. Salvation, sacrifice, and the coming of the Kingdom for Jesus, were never going to be simple and easy. There would be blood and pain. And the final salvation of the world will not be something that is clean and clinical. It involves war and death and human suffering.

And on His ultimate arrival in the days to come, we will thankfully embrace this final anguish, recognizing that Christ must do whatever needs to be done in order to bring an end to all injustice, and to bring real and lasting peace. There are some radical changes that need to take place before the Kingdom of God can be brought to birth. A lot of things are going to be torn down before they are built up, as the pain and injustices of this world run very deep.

Is that good news? I think it all depends on where we stand.

If we decide to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and love and serve our neighbor in need, then we will take comfort with what is to come. If we do not, if we celebrate Christmas as a holiday, and not a Holy Day, then the thought of all this anguish and destruction may be very terrifying.

That is not to say we should not enjoy Christmas as a festival, but that we should be thankful to God for everything He has given to us, and for everything He has done for us.

Remember, Jesus commanded us: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

It is easy to say this, but do we truly follow what Jesus told us to do?

We should hold these commandments in our hearts. We should live our lives in such a manner as to be worthy of all our blessings.

And, most of all, we should be thankful to Almighty God for His Christmas present to us: His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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