

Sermon ✝ November 28, 2021

Luke 21:25-36

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*“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

You know, if you really think about, those words could almost sound depressing. I mean we do come to church to get cheered up, don't we? Really, if we want to hear about "nations in anguish and perplexity", we simply have to watch five minutes of the evening news.

The news has been terrible lately: floods, fires, trials, the parade in Waukesha. I don't know about you, but the last thing I want to do is come to church and hear more depressing news.

This is the Advent season. It's time to get out the Advent calendars, start the Christmas cards, and try to be a little bit nicer to people than we are during the rest of the year.

And you know, I would like to preach a sermon that would get us all in the holiday mood this morning . . . but there is this lesson from St. Luke. It's been bothering me all week—like a bad mosquito bite that won't go away, I am forced, once again, to look at Advent in its true light.

Advent is not so much the time to prepare for the birth of a sweet, innocent, cuddly, little child as it is to get ready for the time when that child—now a man *and* Savior—will come again.

Advent, the real story, focuses around a couple of central themes . . . judgement being one. Advent has about it a note of judgement.

It is the reality of impending doom . . . things won't always be like this . . . God may finally say "no" to humanity.

That's the scary side of Advent. We know that we are not always the kind of people that God would have us be. We forget God's words much more than we remember them.

If we can just have enough advance warning for his second coming, we can probably get our act together. But if he comes unexpectedly, we might as well forget it!

It's kind of like when I used to babysit for my younger sister . . . and our parents would arrive home earlier than expected to find us cooking up some mess in the kitchen.

But think about —when we consider our day-to-day actions—there probably is some need to worry. To paraphrase a bumper sticker: *“Jesus is coming . . . and he's . . . mad.”* While Advent would have us consider our judgement, there is also a note of hope. (the other central theme).

*“When you see these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

St. Paul was also caught up with this whole notion of hope. He wrote about it to the congregation in Rome:

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*

The news isn't all bad for there is hope . . . but it is a very radical kind of hope. The Christian hope is not based on current projections of future probabilities. It's not about scientific calculations.

Our hope is based on the steadfast conviction that even in the depths of our turmoil there leaps out to us a word of welcome and of affirmation and of greeting.

And this strong conviction is grounded in the ever unfolding knowledge that in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, God has spoken an ultimate word to humankind. And the word is: *“Yes”!*

But wait a minute, before we get too excited about this great news, we need to be aware. The acceptance of this hope carries with it some responsibility . . . also a couple of very real temptations.

The first temptation is a kind of apathetic indifference. Because our ultimate triumph has been secured. Because God's final word is, *“Yes”*, we may think we do not need to pay attention to the cries of the wounded or the moaning of those in affliction.

There is always the temptation to turn our hope into callousness and apathy. And hey, *“I've got what I need, why worry about anybody else!”*

While the church is busy preaching a message of hope, it can also be thinking only of itself, when that happens the church is no longer the church in mission for it is devoid of compassion and love and awareness.

The other temptation is to demand that this hope be given immediate context in this world. We want to translate the vision of the kingdom into a hard and fast concrete form—right now. And we don't want to wait.

But we need to remember even Jesus admitted that he didn't know when all of this would happen. But he always warned of our need to be on guard.

Well okay, the news for this day isn't all bad. And like so many other matters of life, there is a choice to be made.

During Advent we consider the tension that exists between good and evil—between judgement and hope. And as we do, I'm reminded of that story that comes to us from the early days of the American colonies.

As the story goes, there was a judge in Hartford, Connecticut, who was presiding in court one morning when a total eclipse of the sun occurred.

The people in the courtroom began to panic for eclipses were not particularly well understood in that time and most in the room feared that a cosmic catastrophe seemed imminent.

In the midst of the noise and the confusion, the judge rapped his gavel, called for order, and said: *“If this be the end of the world, let us at least be found doing our duty. Bring in the candles.”*

Perhaps this is what our radical hope is all about. As we face distress among nations and catastrophes and confusion and fear about our future, let us be found doing our duty . . . living as people responsible in love for the continuing construction of the human community.

Bring in the candles! . . . for the light has already come into the world filling us with love and hope.