

Look Down The Road

November 29, 2009

Luke 21:25-36

Our scripture reading today comes from the Gospel of Luke Chapter 21 verses 25 – 36. Please listen for the reading of God’s Word for the people of God.

25"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. 35For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.

Oh Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the meditations of our hearts. Prepare us, oh Lord, your servants, for the receiving of Your Word. Open our eyes that we may see, our hearts that we may feel, our ears that we may hear and our minds that we may come to understand all that you have to offer us today. In Christ wonderful and holy name we pray. Amen!

If you will recall, just a short couple of weeks ago we read from the book of Mark the account of Jesus’ disciples finding themselves in awe of the building of the temple in Jerusalem. “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings,” they said to Jesus as they were leaving the temple grounds. (Mark 13:1) Also remember that Jesus did not show the same sort of interest in the greatness of the buildings as his disciples did. In fact, with little emotion he tells them that in the days to come that not one stone of the temple would remain

one upon the other. Jesus words marked the foretelling of the destruction of the temple; a downfall of the center of Jewish worship, life and religious heritage.

What a difference a couple of weeks can make in our perception of a scripture reading. Two weeks ago we asked the question, “Where is the good news?” only to answer the question by focusing in on the nugget phrase found at the end of the reading which stated, “7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” (Mark 13:7 – 8). And so now, just two weeks removed from our understanding of the importance of birth pains as a needed introduction to the deliverance of life, we find ourselves at the beginning of a whole new Year; a whole new Season and equipped with a whole new series of questions . . .

Raise your hand this morning if the first thought you had on your mind as you awoke this morning had anything to do with the second coming of Jesus. How many of you at anytime during the morning today spent time expecting, anticipating or being alert for the coming of the Son of Man? Being alert for the fulfillment of God’s promises? For the coming of God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven? ([David Ewart](#))

As I watched the end of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade this past Thursday, I saw the excitement and heard the joy in the cheers of those on the streets as Old Saint Nick arrived on the scene. I couldn’t help but find myself in my own state of awe. Not the type of awe that the disciple’s found themselves in as they were overjoyed by the greatness of the temple, but rather the kind of awe that signaled a slight heartache as I realized for the first time how much our culture misses the true meaning of Christmas each year.

Here we are, at the beginning of the Advent Season. We are reminded of the “God-sized anticipation” that the Season offers us and rather than sing songs of praise to Christ and joyfully cheer with excitement at the prospect of his return, we instead find ourselves overcome with commercialism and the hunt for the best price on the latest advertised craze. People who found themselves lined up for hours this past week to be the first to get their holiday shopping deals probably spent more time in line during that one single day than they have in

prayer over the course of the past three months. People won't get up an hour later than they usually would for work to get to church on time, but they will certainly get up five and six hours earlier to go shopping on the day after thanksgiving. What does this say about us as a community, a culture or a nation?

Of course I realize in discussing holiday shopping I am probably speaking to some of you who sit here this morning. Some of you fought your way through the holiday masses to get the best deal early Friday morning and you know what? . . . It's ok. I am not saying that people shouldn't take advantage of such deals, especially in "this economy." What I am saying is that our actions speak to our priorities. When we become more interested in what the world has to offer than what God has to offer, then we find that our priorities are all out of balance.

If I can't get to church on Sunday morning because I stayed up too late shopping, watching TV or drinking with my buddies, then there is a definite problem with my priorities. Every moment of everyday, our every action and every purpose should be about the constant anticipation of the return of Christ and the reconciliation of our relationship with our God through our relationship with Christ; especially during this season of Advent, the very word of which means "coming." The Season of Advent, then, calls each of us to "renew and rehearse" our relationship with Christ and to focus on God's will for our lives. ([David Ewart](#))

An immaculate conception, the birth of a baby, the singing of angles, the arrival of Shepherds and the navigation of the Magi by a guiding star – these are all images that give us cause to celebrate and give us hope this time each year. However, these images are just a sample of something more; something bigger and more grandiose. These images mark the beginning of a journey that will lead us to foreign lands, tell us stories of great friendships, undying devotion and the overcoming of great trials. We will see people healed of their illnesses; freed from their demon possession and even brought back to life from the dead. A journey that will end in the eyes of mankind with tragedy sparked by the betrayal of a friend, yet in the eyes of our heavenly Creator offers a fantastic moment of renewal, realignment and reconciliation between creation and our Creator;

the beginning of a new covenant between God and mankind. A body broken and blood spilt for the remission of sin for those who believe and accept.

The powerful, violent, fearsome images used by Jesus in our scripture reading today remind us just how far we find ourselves each day from holding up our terms of the covenant offered to us by Christ. If God's will were to be imposed on earth today, would we see that we are need of a few minor tweaks here and there? I think not. Instead I believe we would find ourselves in need of a major overhaul; a *fainting from fear* type of change is what we need. ([David Ewart](#))

For those who have been well equipped for Christ return, those who find themselves in relationship with Christ; accepting of the Salvation we have been promised by Christ death and resurrection; those who have taken the lessons of Advent to heart; who have not been distracted by the cheery songs and glittery gifts, whose hearts long for God's deeper purposes – for these, Jesus says: *Don't faint from fear. Instead, stand up. Raise your heads. Your salvation is drawing near.*

As a child I had a great love for comic strips. In an old Calvin and Hobbes comic strip the following conversation takes place.

In the first frame Calvin speaks to Hobbes and says:

"Live for the moment is my motto. You never know how long you got".

In the second frame he explains

"You could step into the road tomorrow and WHAM; you get hit by a cement truck!

Then you'd be sorry you put off your pleasures. That's what I say - live for the moment."

And then he asks Hobbes:

"What's your motto?"

With which Hobbes replies:

"My motto is - Look down the road."

And so I encourage each of you this morning to steer clear of the fearful anticipations of Calvin which can cause you to become misguided, irresponsible or even cause you to, as our scripture reading warns us today, to faint with fear. Jesus spoke of this when he said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.” (Mark 13:33 – 35) We should rather be like Hobbes; whose motto is to *look ahead* and, if I may add, prayerfully consider what we see. Jesus said, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (Mark 13:36)

Though we may find ourselves terribly frightened at times, let us find comfort in the truth that we have not fainted. We have stood up both as individuals and as a community of faith. Together we have raised our heads and our hands; we have loved and encouraged one another through songs and prayer and though we find ourselves still in the early days, we are beginning to see faintly that our salvation is drawing near. Hold fast today to the promises of God and look forward at not only the coming of the Christ Child, but also to the promised return of Christ; a return that is sure to offer excitement and overwhelming joy for those who are prepared.

Are you prepared this morning? Are you ready for Christ’s return? It would be foolish for me to think that I know each and every heart in this room as well as you yourselves now your own heart. Look deep within yourself today and ask the question, “Am I ready?” If you haven’t made Christ your personal Savior today; if you have not looked down the road and taken notice of the end that is to come then I encourage you to do so this morning. As we sing our sermon hymn this morning, if you would like to pray; for yourself, for your salvation or for someone close to you, I would like to invite you then to please come forward as together we sing *Wonderful Merciful Savior*.