

LUKE 21:25-37

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. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

Then Jesus told them a parable: Look at the fig tree and all the trees—as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life; and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

NOT YET

LUKE 21:35-37

Twenty-one hundred years ago—give or take a decade or two—Jesus uttered these words. And yet, do they not reflect a startling resemblance to the current state of our world? Are we not in distress over the foreboding signs of disaster which we confront daily with every breaking news story? We continue to bear the scars from our worldwide pandemic which is far from over. Unvaccinated young children are packing the pediatric hospital rooms. We are still reeling from the January 6 attack on our Capitol Building. The devastating wild fires which plagued the West all summer and pictures of Lake Mead literally drying up due to the ever-deepening drought with another *La Nina* winter on our doorsteps that will likely worsen conditions in the southwest and produce mudslides and flooding in the fire scorched areas. The changing Climate is becoming an Armageddon which if it doesn't concern all of us, it should. We're lucky so far—we are only six inches above normal for the year. Winter is coming and heating bills could well rise 75% due to increased prices of fossil fuels. And then there is overt racism with hateful rhetoric rushing like an overflowing river through social media. We have become a Culture of

Contempt. And do I even have to mention our dysfunctional governments whom we look to solve these problems and all we see is rancid partisanship blocking attempts at solutions? I could go on for quite a while because these examples represent just the tip of the iceberg—which by the way is melting.

But this is our reality and while Advent is a season offering us a glimmer of hope, it is overlaid this year—and I suppose every year—by a thick layer of darkness...or is it smoke? Because let's be honest, every Christmas season creates a medley of intense emotions which we cannot avoid and must manage. There is, of course, excitement as we anticipate reuniting with friends and relatives we may not have seen in a long while because of pandemic restrictions. Our children and grandchildren will eagerly verbalize their wish lists of what gifts they would like Santa to bring. There will be feasting, carol singing and decorating. It's all fun stuff and we need some fun in our lives right now.

But as we all know, there is a flip side to all this because we may be haunted by memories of past Christmases, we celebrated with loved ones who are no longer with us. Any losses we have endured will be amplified by the holidays as will internal family issues that may plague us. So, in many circumstances, the holidays are a setup for emotional trauma.

Busyness can help us cope, but it will not negate the pain.

It is therefore significant that the theme we are pursuing during this Advent season is “Coming Home.” And it is so relevant because beneath all of these intense emotions is an undercurrent of longing. It is what we feel when we have been gone from home way too long and anxiously anticipate our return. How many times have we said, “I can’t wait to get home!” When I was a kid and we arrived home from a long trip, my mother always said, “Home again, Home again, jiggety jig.” You know that feeling.

“Home” represents many things to us. It is a physical place to be sure, but it is more than that. It is also a metaphor for a sense of security and familiarity; it is the location of friends and activities we share; it is where we feel we belong. Getting home is also a yearning to return to a place of hope and confidence in our future. But by its very nature, longing is attached to the future—not today. It has a Not Yet character to it which is a source of both sadness and anticipation. “When will we get there?” It is a spiritual issue that Jesus addresses in our Scripture: *People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **Then** they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* This will happen **then**, but not now.

Isn't hope future oriented as well? *Look at the fig tree and all the trees—as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer already near.* Jesus is comforting his followers and encouraging them to be patient and remain faithful. And this is a theme we see throughout the scriptural witness. When God promised the Hebrew people upon their escape from Egypt that they would occupy their own country it was a future event—Not Yet. When Noah repeatedly sent out the dove to discover if the water was receding it returned three times before they got the good news. For centuries, the Israelites anticipated the coming of the Messiah, but God repeatedly replied, Not Yet. And the early followers of Jesus believed he would imminently return and we are still living in the Not Yet era.

This is the tension we face in Advent. The Messiah has come to fulfill a promise. The dove did not return because the waters had receded. The Israelites wandered for 40 years, but conquered the Canaanites to take possession of their Promised Land. So, while we celebrate the birth of our Savior, our everlasting home is nearby, but Not Yet realized. We are not living in the Kingdom of God.

So, shall we despair? Shall we give up our faith? We have grown accustomed in our lives to instant gratification. You can order it today and

tomorrow it is delivered. If Amazon can do it, why can't God? But if you look at the scope of history, you have to understand that while God does not have Next Day Delivery, God does keep promises. Of course, we are disappointed when we lay out our vision and then realize that it cannot reach fruition...Yet.

Our challenge as we journey forward in Advent is to acknowledge that things are far from perfect in both our world and our lives. And at the same time to embrace the coming of the Christ which guarantees that in spite of everything there is hope. But we have to live with that ambiguity. It is all about trust. In the absence of trust, there is no hope. We all want to get Home and the arrival of the Messiah is God's promise that we will.

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