

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 28, 2021

1st Sunday of Advent/Year C

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:25-36

Sermon Title: “Hope for Those Who Wait”

Theme

God will fulfill God’s purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God’s people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God’s promised redemption.

Text

Jesus said: ²⁵“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. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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.”

Sermon

The Gospel Reading for this week points out the vast differences people seek in their Messiah, as if we get a choice, and yet for all, Jesus brings "Hope for Those Who Wait."

At the time Jesus spoke these words, there were two classes of Jews. The wealthy class made up of business people, educated people, and the priesthood – yes, you heard me right, the priesthood was among the wealthiest class of Judaism. And the peasant class; those who labored for a living, and honestly, scraped by. If the Romans didn't take all their money, the Temple tried to also, with its burdensome taxes, required offerings, and sacrifices.

Both classes of Jews waited for God's hoped-for Messiah, whom they just knew would meet their criteria of what Messiah would be like. Both wanted a political-military leader whom they could make king and lead them to run the Romans out of town and return Israel to the glory days of King David. Everyone would prosper! However, the details of what that hoped-for Messiah would be like differed greatly among those classes.

The wealthy didn't really want things to be upset unless it was good for them; good for business.

The poor just wanted fairness; enough to make a living for themselves and their families.

In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus came along and said some frightening words; words of warning, of impending doom, it seemed. But then, I guess it depends on one's spiritual foundation. Granted, I am judging, but for the wealthy of the 1st century, life was good. They had the luxury of complying with the law. They had enough wealth to pay the Temple tax, make offerings and sacrifices. If Jesus' frightening words were good for business, great! But if he was going to mess up the good thing they had going, then no thank you. They dismissed Jesus.

Jesus concluded this passage with some frightening words, words of warning, of impending doom. He said,

²⁸"Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your *redemption* is drawing near."

Redemption can be defined as:

Redemption ~ the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil.

Again, I'm judging, but the wealthy Jews probably knew they were justified according to the Law because they were able to comply with its demands.

Redemption was not something they needed.

That was probably not the case with the poor. The poor struggled to comply with the Law because it took needed money and food off their family's tables. Jewish peasants did whatever they had to do to scrounge out a living. Oftentimes, even most of the time, shepherds, prostitutes, and tax collectors, among the lowest and most despised of society, held those jobs not because it was their career choice, but because it was their only choice to survive. And by vocation, they were unclean, and therefore, unwelcome in the Temple. I am certain that when they heard the word "redemption" it appealed to them.

Jesus was speaking of the end of the age, when he, the Son of Man, will come again to judge all people. He said there will be signs – just what the signs are have been perplexing Christians ever since. But about that time, Jesus said, *we* need to be ready. That's right. I said *we* need to be ready.

I am aware that most of the world, even the Christian world, has no idea what Advent is, let alone, what it means. For most Christians, Advent is that four-week season of preparation for Christmas, but that would be wrong. The season of Advent is actually a season of preparation for Christ's return. Jesus Christ said he would return, and the Season of Advent is like an annual drill to examine our preparation. How are you doing? Are you ready?

I acknowledge that this is not a cheery passage or sermon that will lift your spirits as you trim your Christmas trees and engage the hustle and bustle of the shopping season in search of the perfect gifts for your loved ones.

I hope that you are ready because people of faith who are ready have nothing to worry about. Jesus said that when prepared people of faith observe these signs

begin to happen, we need not worry. The fact is he advises the opposite of worry. He advises us to 'stand up and raise our heads because our redemption is drawing near.'

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

It is difficult for us to understand how 1st Century Jews felt about their situation. Israel was not a sovereign nation. They survived under the boot of the Romans.

Jewish leadership made up of the Sanhedrin, the religious aristocracy that managed a tenuous copacetic relationship with the Romans. They were comfortable in their confused understanding of their life as God's chosen people. They longed for Messiah to come, but he had to be one of their liking.

Certainly, the Jewish peasant class had it worse. The way Judaism had developed, with its numerous commandments, laws, and statues, made being faithful law-abiding Jews a burden, both financially and religiously. On top of that was added the burden of being a subject of Rome. They longed for Messiah to come, to relieve them of their hardship.

Let's do some self-examination. Can you relate to either class?

Generally speaking, I think it is difficult for us to relate to 1st Century Judaism. I say that because most of us, not all of us but most of us, are so blessed. I think if the truth were known, there would not be many of us who really hope for Jesus to return *now*. We've got it pretty good *now*.

Speaking only for myself, I want to be able to live long enough with Carol to spend down what we've saved for. I want to see both my children married and raising families if that is what they want to do. I want to grow old with Carol and together watch our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Intellectually I know that heaven will be better, better than I can imagine, but honestly, I have it pretty good right now – what's the rush? Can you relate?

I think that our satisfaction with the status quo and our complacency about it is exactly the timeless issue Jesus was speaking to.

Here on this first weekend of Advent, our Lord Jesus wants to remind us, and more than remind us, shake us out of our complacency, to be aware that he will return, and his return is more expected now than in any other time in history.

To be clear, I do not know what tomorrow brings, let alone this Advent season. I'm not telling you to put off your decorating and gift buying. With the understanding that we do these things because we are celebrating God's greatest gift in Jesus, I think our festivities honor God in Christ. I'm just telling you to keep it in perspective. It gets better from here. Our redemption is drawing near. I wouldn't want you to miss it. Jesus Christ our Savior and God's Messiah promised to return, and I take him at his word, you would be wise to also.

The Gospel Reading for this week points out the vast differences people seek in their Messiah, as if we get a choice. We should be thankful we don't get a choice, because God our Father, knows what we need better than we do. And in God's wisdom, he sent Jesus. And Jesus promised to return, and until he returns, he brings "Hope for Those Who Wait" whether we desire his return now or not.

Prayer

Loving God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Christ, send us your Spirit to shake us out of our complacency and fill us with hopeful anticipation of his return. May we be found ready. We pray this in his name. Amen