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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, December 2, 2018
1st Sunday of Advent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 21:25-36
Sermon Title: “Hope for God’s Presence”

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

Thank you Joan, for finding us yet another beautiful Advent Wreath Lighting Ceremony

This season of Advent we will be guided by the theme of Hope, and more specifically, this week we will focus on "Hope for God's Presence."

On the Second Sunday of Advent the theme will be "Hope of God's Peace."

On the Third Sunday of Advent the theme will be "Hope for God's Joy."

And on the Fourth Sunday of Advent the theme will be "Hope for God's Love."

And just to get you thinking about it, on Christmas Eve the theme will be, "Hope has Come."

In the First Reading from Jeremiah, The LORD used the prophet Jeremiah to deliver a message that the LORD is bringing an end to the misery of the people. What misery you ask? I am so glad you did. By the time of Jeremiah's ministry, the unified nation known as Israel had divided into two separate nations. The northern tribes took the name Judah, and the southern tribes retained the name Israel – yea, that's not confusing right from the start, right?

But the division caused them to fight with each other and made them twice as vulnerable to other enemies. Those enemies did come, first it was the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans at the time of Jesus.

As we can imagine, it was difficult being an occupied people. The occupying nations fleeced Israel for all they were worth and essentially made them slaves; impose their harsh laws and penalties they may have been in opposition to the customs and traditions of the Israelites, and most harshly, could impose their own pagan religions and outlaw the religion of the Israelites.

Do you remember the Ark of the Covenant and Temple? The Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be very footstool of God. And the Temple was the dwelling place of God among the Israelites. But the Ark was stolen by their enemies and the

Temple was razed to the ground. This broke the spirit of the people and in a very visible way, the Israelites no longer had the presence of God among them.

It was into this setting that the LORD gave Jeremiah a message. A message of "Hope for God's Presence."

Since it is a short reading, I would like to read it for you again.

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Of course, we Christians know that that "righteous Branch" spoke of was indeed the presence of God among God's people, God incarnate, Emmanuel, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Moving on to the Gospel Reading, as you know, Advent is the first season of the liturgical calendar, so happy liturgical new year to you all. You will remember that the lectionary is a three year rotation of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, with John thrown in occasionally each year.

This year we will be in the Gospel of Luke. And while in just over three weeks from now we will be celebrating the birth of baby Jesus, God's present to the world and God's Presence among us, on this weekend we find Jesus very near the end of his public ministry warning his disciples of the end of the age and the advent of his promised return.

Of course, that is why this this reading is appropriate for this day. Many people, many Christians think that Advent is that season before Christmas; a season to prepare our hearts and homes and churches for the baby Jesus, and all that gift-giving and celebrating – but it's not! At least not entirely.

The season of Advent was an invention of the Church back in the mid-Fifth Century as a period of preparation for Jesus' second advent; his second coming, because, as we heard him say himself in the Gospel Reading, he will return. And so he advises

us, encourages, exhorts us, to prepare ourselves, our hearts and our lives for his promised return.

It's OK to remember his nativity. It's OK to celebrate God's gift to the world of God's Presence with gift-giving. It's OK to gather and celebrate Christmas with family and friends – as long as we remember that Advent has a real and important and practical purpose; to remind us that he will return as he promised he would, and we need to be ready.

As Jesus spoke to his disciples, he made it sound ominous with signs in the stars and moon and tsunami's. There will be fear and foreboding of what is coming to the world. It sounds like just about any day on earth, doesn't it?

Ask the people of California ravaged by wildfires, the people of Alaska decimated by earthquake and concerned about a tsunami, or the English after Brexit, or the military personnel on the DMZ between North and South Korea, or the people employed by GM/Lordstown or any of the other plants GM announced it will close.

We could use some "Hope for God's Presence" right now couldn't we?

Well, I am here to tell you we have it. Jesus Christ, God' Presence in the world promised to return, and I take him at his word. He will return. He is our "Hope for God's Presence" and we need to be ready. So brothers and sisters in Christ, we have nothing to fear; nothing now though the world seems to be a scary place. And nothing when these signs Jesus spoke of finally take place. He loves us, and gave his life for us. When he returns "stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near."

Prayer

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen